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## **ISLAND OF INTRIGUE**





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"I am very sorry, but it could not be helped," the girl replied rather stiffly, adding:

"I have met with an accident—a taxi smash-up!"

# ISLAND OF INTRIGUE

BY

ISABEL OSTRANDER

*Author of*

*"Suspense," "The Clue in the Air," "The Primed Lure," etc.,*

*ILLUSTRATED*



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1918

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# CONTENTS

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CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE COMING OF MRS. SMITH . . .	1
II	ON BOARD THE TORTOISE . . .	17
III	LORNA . . . . .	34
IV	HARD-A-LEE . . . . .	49
V	THE STRANGER . . . . .	68
VI	ROBINSON CRUSOE . . . . .	85
VII	MR. FORDYCE . . . . .	101
VIII	FATE . . . . .	121
IX	INCOGNITO . . . . .	141
X	THE LAST STRAW . . . . .	159
XI	THE OPENED LETTER . . . . .	175
XII	THE TRUTH . . . . .	193
XIII	THE STORM BREAKS . . . . .	210
XIV	IN DURESS . . . . .	230
XV	HOPE . . . . .	251
XVI	THE ESCAPE . . . . .	271
XVII	THE LAST WORD . . . . .	291



21  
3  
3  
X  
2



## CHAPTER I.

### *The Coming of Mrs. Smith.*

**I**'M sorry, Daughter, but I can't take you with me."  
"Oh, daddy," I cried, for his words meant  
the end of weeks of cherished planning.

I am Maida Waring, the only child of Lawrence Waring, whose millions date from the day when, ragged and half starving, he had struck oil on his homestead land. I was nearly seven then, growing up like a wild thing in the open air, my only playmates the three Smith children from the next homestead. Mr. Smith and Daddy were great friends and often Mrs. Smith would come over to "Give a hand with the wash," or knead the big batch of bread,—work too heavy for my frail little mother's slender hands.

Mother died just before the money began to pile up and since then I have lived in boarding schools, while Daddy sent his money into many corners of the world only to have it come back doubled and trebled. Business has taken him to other countries many times



and all my life I have longed to go with him. He had promised to take me after I graduated in June and all this past winter I had pored over maps and planned our itinerary. And Christmas vacation Daddy had given me a huge roll of bills, a charge account at all the shops and permission to buy anything and everything I wanted. It was like being given the freedom of fairyland.

That same evening a reporter came to interview Daddy, and asked questions about my future and when I would make my social *début*. Daddy talked of our plans and how he meant to buy a house in town when we came back. He gave the man one of my new pictures and even showed him an old tintype of both of us, taken by a traveling photographer the day after we struck oil.

The reporter borrowed the tintype and the Sunday paper published a full page about us. Daddy and I laughed over it, for Daddy has never become a snob or tried to deny the old days—when he had mother.

So you see how great was our disappointment when Daddy found that business would prevent his taking me. For with all his trips abroad Daddy has never really seen anything—for he's always had to meet a lot of other financiers and organize a trust or combine or something. I asked Daddy, when he came back from his first trip over, what he thought of England and he said the highballs were warm and he didn't like

the shape of the glasses, so that just shows you.

Daddy and I have been good chums the times we've been together and I was simply dying to go abroad with him, and poke around in all the queer, out-of-the-way places, and see how people lived. Our transportation was all arranged—when Daddy found he would have to leave me here. But the question was—where could I go? I haven't a living relative with whom he could leave me; I was graduating the week before we meant to sail, and I flatly refused a post-graduate course which would keep me immured another year. Just when Daddy was arranging with Miss Farmingdale to chaperone me during the summer there came a letter from Mrs. Smith, asking me to spend the summer with her at Hard-a-lee, their estate on Sunset Island off Cape Cod.

Daddy had kept in touch with them all these years, for he could never forget how kind they had been to mother. "Coal Oil Dan" struck the first of his wells about two years after Daddy did. The Smiths are tremendously rich, of course, but they had made no more strenuous effort to get into society than Daddy had. They had spent much of their time abroad and educated the children there. Aside from Hard-a-lee, Daddy said they had a town house in Chicago and a villa at Palm Beach.

Her invitation solved Daddy's dilemma beautifully for him, and I felt that if I couldn't go with Daddy

the next best thing was being with some one who had known and loved my mother. I was heart-hungry to talk about her and I never dare mention her to Daddy, even after all these years, for he chokes up and his eyes fill, and he goes away by himself for a long, long time.

We had left Paint Rock right after mother died so I hadn't seen any of the Smiths since I was seven, but I remembered her as a stout, fair cowlike woman, with a pleasant soft lisp. Daddy said she had a tendency to diamonds in the morning. She owned quantities of them but they never seemed to have lost their novelty for her. Her little girls had been oddly opposite in appearance and character; Lorna skinny, dark and fiery tempered, Bijou blonde and phlegmatic, like her mother, and stupid as a sheep. The boy, Alaric, I recalled as a stocky little fellow, whose solemn face concealed a perfectly impish propensity for teasing.

Daddy insisted upon my buying the nearest to a Paris outfit that our shops afforded and I found myself the possessor of a formidable pile of luggage for a school girl, accustomed to simple belongings.

"Mrs. Smith will come for you Friday afternoon," Daddy told me. "Alaric is bringing down the yacht and you will go back on that. I wish you'd notice her town car—if you like it I'll order one for you. I suppose Lorna selected it—all soft grays and silver. And

Alaric will teach you to drive this summer. I'll come down for a day before sailing," which statement consoled me very much. "Mrs. Smith suggests that you express your trunks," Daddy concluded, "for they are not certain just where they will dock and Mrs. Smith wants to go back at once."

You can imagine how surprised I was on Friday morning, just after breakfast, when Miss Farmingdale sent word up to me that Mrs. Smith was in the dining-room. It was hours before I expected her, and I ran to the window and peeped out, before I went downstairs. A big, imposing-looking motor car stood at the curb, with a chauffeur and footman in the most conservative livery, and I sighed with relief. I'm not so much of a snob as most parvenues, I think, but I did want Miss Farmingdale to receive a good impression of our old family friend.

Somehow, the nearer I got to the drawing-room doors, the more difficult I found it to go on. I knew the first quarter of an hour was going to be a perfect horror of embarrassment, and I wished with all my heart that it was over.

As I reached the foot of the staircase, I heard a voice which made my heart jump right into my throat. How the sound of it carried me back through the years since I had heard it last! No one else in all the world had that funny, soft little drawl, and the odd lisp. It wasn't a lisp, exactly; at least, she didn't th-h

her esses, if you know what I mean, but sort of slurred them, like a teakettle purring, impossible to reproduce in writing.

I tapped lightly at the door and then, without waiting for Miss Farmingdale to bid me enter, I pushed it open. A stout, motherly-looking woman, with a fluff of fair hair sat by the window. I flew straight into her arms. She hugged me until I felt my face rasp against something sharp on her breast, then held me off and looked at me, and hugged me again.

"My dear Maida! My dear little girl!"

"Aunt Julie! Oh, Aunt Julie!" I choked.

"How like your mother you are!" she murmured, brokenly. "How like dear Margaret! You are the very image of her when I knew her first. She was only a little older than you are now; you're nineteen, ain't—aren't you? Heavens! How time flies! I am so glad to see you again, dear child, and to know that you are going to be with us for a while. The children are so delighted they can hardly wait for you to come. . . . Mercy! when I look at you, I think I am talking to Margaret—You're her all over again!"

That was another little trait of Mrs. Smith's which I remembered suddenly; repeating herself. She had always done that. It was funny, the rush of little forgotten things which came trooping back in my thoughts all at once, answering the call of her voice.

"I—I am so glad, too, dear Aunt Julie!" I said

shyly. "It is so lovely to see you again, and it was kind of you to ask me to visit you. I have been looking forward to it ever since your letter came."

That was a fib, of course, but I wanted to be polite. She had changed, too. The years had made an inevitable difference. She had grown stouter than I remembered her, although her light hair showed no touch of gray, and there were little, faint lines about her eyes and mouth. There was something else, too, more than her outward appearance, which was changed. It was indefinite, intangible, I could not explain it, but I felt it, nevertheless.

I did notice, though, that her toilette was a little over-elaborate for morning wear and she was hung about with gold chains and things. As my eyes fell upon her gown, I saw that the object against which my cheek had pressed when she hugged me, was a huge, old-fashioned brooch of rich, deep colored amethysts, and I gave a little exclamation of pleasure.

"It will be like the old days, to have you with us again," she was saying. "You remember them, Maida?"

"The old days? Indeed I do!" I cried. "Why I even recognize that brooch you are wearing! Do you remember the time, back home in Paint Rock, when you dropped it down the well?"

Miss Farmingdale tried to interpose austere, but Mrs. Smith was too quick for her.

"I should say so!" she exclaimed heartily, with her little infectious laugh. "Think of your remembering such a thing as that all this time! But wait until you see the children. You'll hardly know them, they've grown like weeds."

Here Miss Farmingdale coughed authoritatively.

"Mrs. Smith has called for you earlier than was arranged for because she wishes to put her yacht out of commission for a time, as soon as the trip to Sunset Island has been made," she interposed. "You may go and prepare for an immediate departure, Miss Waring."

"Yes! Captain Andrews discovered that there is something wrong with the machinery, and it must be put right without delay. Isn't it provoking, just at the beginning of the season, too! I thought the *Tortoise* was thoroughly overhauled a month ago, but it must have been very negligently attended to," Aunt Julie explained. "Hurry now, dear, and we'll start. The children are so wildly impatient to see you."

I did hurry, but somehow I felt queer and disappointed. It was idiotic, of course, for me to feel that way. I knew it was only because of the lapse of time since I had seen her last, and that when this first sense of strangeness had worn off, everything would be all right. I hated myself for it, but I could not help criticizing Aunt Julie in my mind. She seemed common to me, her manner a little coarser than I had

expected, in spite of her well-groomed, luxurious appearance, and the air of affluence she exuded at every breath.

I was bitterly ashamed of that thought the next minute. I told myself that I was no better than she, anyway, only I had become adapted to newly acquired prosperity more readily than an older person could. This critical snobbishness was all the fault of the veneer of eastern polish with which Miss Farmingdale had plastered me.

I descended again to the drawing-room, feeling wholesomely contrite and ashamed.

Miss Farmingdale bade me a chilly and admonitory farewell, and the great, front door closed with a heavy, well-bred thud behind me; closed forever and ever on my school days, and I felt as if I were stepping out into an unknown world with Aunt Julie.

The limousine was lined with the softest dove-gray cloth, and perfectly appointed in dull, unburnished silver. I made an instant mental resolve to have my own motor, an exact replica of this, inside, only I decided to have my monogram on the silver mountings and accessories smaller than the big, splashing, aggressive J. D. S. which sprawled over everything before me.

"So this is really Margaret's baby!" Aunt Julie beamed on me, adding with a little conscious laugh. "Tell me, Maida, do you think I have changed very



much? I've grown to be an old woman, of course, but I mean in other ways."

She looked at me so anxiously that I quickly reassured her, despite my own contrary belief.

"Indeed, no, Aunt Julie! You haven't changed in the least. I should have known you anywhere. And you haven't grown a bit old, either! You are just as I remember you when I was a little girl."

She laughed again, in a relieved way this time, as if her innocent vanity were appeased and reached for the silver handglass.

"You've no idea," she remarked, confidentially, "what money will do for your appearance, when you're beginning to go off a little in looks. I won't say there isn't a lot that's natural about me, yet, but you ought to see me before my maid gets through with me in the morning! If we'd always stayed as poor as we were when Daniel and I were married, I should be a wrinkled old woman now, bent with toil and care. Money is just everything in the world!"

"I don't know," I replied doubtfully. "Mother and Daddy were happy before he struck oil, and happiness is greater than everything else, isn't it?"

"Of course, but happiness depends on money, nowadays anyway. You're young, Maida, my dear, and I expect you have your illusions about romance, and love, and nobility, and fame maybe, but they're none of them realities unless wealth brings them to you.

I know, your father knows, that money's the only thing that counts in the end."

She spoke with such queer intensity, that I turned and glanced at her. Her wide, placid eyes had narrowed to little cold slits, and gleamed like points of steel, and her face had fallen into lines which changed her whole expression. She was like a different woman, a stranger, and I felt afraid of her.

What a change the control of wealth must have made in her outlook on things, I thought to myself, since Uncle Dan's death!

As if my surprise had communicated itself to her, she turned quickly with the old pleasant smile I knew so well.

"There!" she exclaimed, "that sounded like a real old miser, didn't it? That's one of the dangers of money, I guess. It becomes a sort of god if you're not careful, especially if you haven't had it always.—Tell me about your school. Did you like it? That Farmingdale woman was a cold, stuck-up thing, worse than the nuns at the convent just outside of Paris where I finished Bijou. I very nearly did finish her altogether, poor child, for although their religion had all the improvements, ancient and modern, their drainage was awful, and Bijou had a very bad case of typhoid."

"I know. I was so sorry to hear of it," I replied. "Daddy told me. You wrote him, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes. I'd forgotten you knew. I was so worried and heartsick I had to tell somebody. Your father is closer to me than anyone in the world, except the children," she added. "He was Daniel's best friend, you know, always."

Aunt Julie's husband had been just "Dan" in former times, I remembered suddenly. I suppose she didn't consider it compatible with the dignity of the late oil plutocrat's position to abbreviate his name. My father is "Oil Well Waring" to the world at large, but I'm sure if Mother had lived, he would still have been "my Larry" to her.

"Didn't Lorna go to the same convent with Bijou?" I asked.

"Only for a little while. She was delicate, growing fast, and I found she was getting knock-kneed from the hard stone chapel floor, and hoarse from dampness."

"She had adenoids, anyway," I remarked suddenly, with horrible, unthinking rudeness, just as the thought popped into my head. But Aunt Julie didn't seem to mind.

"Yes, only we called them enlarged tonsils in the old-fashioned days," she added. "We had them burned out for a dollar and a half doctor's visit. Now it's a two hundred dollar operation, with a new name and a specialist, if you've got money and they know it. Lorna's got her adenoids still, and her appendix, too,

and she'll have them till she dies, if I have anything to say about it! The Lord put them where they are for some purpose of His own, and I guess He knew the business of creation better than the doctors."

I giggled, and then a queer little feeling came over me. It was taking quite a long while for us to reach the yacht landing, and suddenly I noticed we were going north instead of south. Aunt Julie saw my look of bewilderment, and laughed frankly at her own forgetfulness.

"I do believe it slipped my mind to tell you," she said. "I explained to Miss Farmingdale before you came down. We changed our plans at the last minute, and anchored in the Hudson, just below Tarrytown. It was a whim of Alaric's. There's a girl, the daughter of a big broker downtown, whose summer house is near there, and Alaric is crazy about her. He is such a comfort to me, dearie, he always does the right thing. I was afraid he was going to be a little rough, in some ways, like his father, but he just took to culture like a burro to carrots. Land knows he spends money enough in a year to keep a royal family, but it gets him in with the right people, and that's the main thing. Wasn't it lucky, that I was so set on giving him a fine, high-sounding name? Daniel wanted him called Uriah, you know, after his father, but I put my foot down on that!"

I wanted to giggle again, but her eyes were fixed on

me, so I began to chatter about school, and my intention to make a real home for Daddy in the autumn, and all that we meant to do together.

The car skimmed along the smooth, sunny roads through the lovely, vivid greens of early summer. In spite of my disappointment about going abroad with Daddy, I felt really glad I was alive, and young, with the future so bright, and everything so lovely!

I think I must have told more to Aunt Julie in the next hour, than I had in ten years, to anyone. I felt that she sort of read between the lines, and understood perfectly the things I left unsaid. She impressed me now, in my older judgment, as being shrewd in her matter-of-fact, kindly way, in spite of her disingenuousness. I know I talked more than ever before in my life. It was like floodgates opening. \* But for some reason the gates didn't open really wide, at that. There were little intimate thoughts which I kept back instinctively, although I didn't know why.

"We're almost there now," observed Aunt Julie, at last. "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Maida, we have another guest, a friend of Alaric's, going on with us to Hard-a-lee for a visit. I'm sure you will like him immensely, we all do. He's a Frenchman, Monsieur Pelissier."

I felt a little sorry. I had taken it for granted that I would be the only guest, and I should have liked to be alone with the family for a few days.

However, I murmured a conventional polite phrase

or two about my pleasure at the prospect of meeting him, and asked when we would get under way.

"Oh, immediately," Aunt Julie quickly replied. "Do you like the water?"

"Yes, indeed, I love it!" I cried, enthusiastically. "Don't you, Aunt Julie?"

"Just between ourselves, I don't!" she returned. "I suppose I'd be sick, even on a ferryboat, and I'm scared too. Alaric makes fun of the *Tortoise*, and he's always after me to get a faster boat, but this is enough for me. He's got a racing motor-boat up at Sunset Island that he goes shooting around in, and it just brings my heart up in my mouth to see him. I won't let the girls go out with him. Bijou don't want to, she's a lot like me, but Lorna would dare anything. I never know what that girl's going to do next! I declare she keeps me on the jump the whole time!"

"She hasn't changed very much, then, has she?" I laughed. "She always was a little unexpected, as I remember her."

"Unexpected!" echoed Aunt Julie. "If you should put a stick of dynamite under Lorna she couldn't be more sudden, sometimes. I don't know how I ever came to have a child like her."

We were going down hill now, and the sharp salty breeze blew in at the open window. The road narrowed and dipped sharply as we neared the river, and we rolled over the railroad tracks and out upon

a little wharf. The Hudson was beautiful, with bright sunlight gleaming upon it and across its glistening expanse the purple green of the rising hills like the banked-up somber clouds of a summer storm. Busy steamers and fussy little tugs were hurrying up and down the river, and right in shore a tiny, graceful white yacht rode at anchor, pulling at the ropes with the out-going current, as if she were anxious to be off, and impatiently awaited our coming.

Three figures were standing at the rail watching our approach; two young men in flannels, and a girl in a long white sweater. The sun glinted on her fluffy, golden hair, and I knew that she must be Bijou. A dinghy was beside the wharf, with an immaculate, bronzed sailor at the oars, and another at the bow, waiting to hand us in.

"I don't see Lorna!" Aunt Julie's voice trembled, and her face all at once became strained and ghastly beneath its frank mask of powder. "Where can she be?"

We quickly reached the yacht and a dainty little ladder with covered steps was let down.

"You go first, dearie," said Aunt Julie.

I grasped the rail, and placed my foot upon the lowest step when a man's voice cried sharply from above.

"My God, where's Lorna?"

## CHAPTER II.

### *On Board the Tortoise.*

**I**NVOLUNTARILY I stepped back, but two big hands reached down and helped me to the deck, and I found myself confronting a short, thick-set young man, with dark eyes and a very square jaw.

"Welcome on board the *Tortoise*, Maida!" he said, seizing my hand and shaking it violently. It was his voice which had uttered that sudden exclamation. I was in no doubt of his identity.

"How do you do, Alaric?" I said.

The girl with the golden hair pushed hastily past him, and throwing her arms around my neck, kissed me gushingly.

"Oh, Maida darling, I'm so glad you've come!" she cried. "We've been waiting so anxiously to see you again!—Alaric, do help mother. Maida, let me present Monsieur Pelissier."

The other young man came forward and bowed very



low over my hand. He was dark, too, and tall, and his voice was caressingly musical.

"I am charmed!" he said with the faintest trace of an accent. "I have heard much of Miss Waring."

"I hope no tales out of school!" I laughed. "I'm afraid I was a rather naughty little girl, sometimes."

"Where is Lorna?" asked Aunt Julie, with increasing perturbation. "Isn't she here?"

It was Monsieur Pelissier who replied:

"She took the train into town soon after you left this morning. Ah, you ladies when you go to shop, you think the clock stands still for you!"

"It is so provoking of her!" Aunt Julie was gazing shoreward, and her face was turned from me. "I can't think what is keeping her!"

"Perhaps she missed her train, and will be in on the next. There's nothing to worry about, mother," drawled Bijou with a shrug. "Come, Maida, I'll show you to your cabin."

The sailors were carrying my dressing-bag and suitcases over the side, and I followed Bijou below.

The yacht was a little beauty, bright with brass-work, and glistening with new paint. The little pink-upholstered salon through which we passed, was as dainty as a boudoir, all in white and gold, with rose silk curtains and cushions everywhere.

My cabin was perfectly appointed, but tiny, and I was glad the port was open for I was almost over-

powered by the perfume with which Bijou seemed impregnated. She actually reeked of it, that heavy, cloying assertive sort of perfume which you usually associate in your mind with theaters and a certain type of cosmopolitan restaurant where Daddy has taken me once or twice, because it's only in such places, as a rule, that you come in contact with people who use it. You know the sort of perfume I mean.

"Aunt Julie is worried about Lorna, isn't she?" I remarked, as I took off my hat. "I hope nothing has happened."

"It's silly of Mother. Lorna's old enough to take care of herself, I guess," Bijou ran her fingers over my hair lightly. "How lovely and thick your hair has grown!"

I shrank a little way. Bijou's hands were beautiful, slim and soft, and pearly white, but her nails were hideously long and pointed, and polished like glass. People's hands always impress one, the first thing, and Bijou's seemed somehow typical of her whole personality, ornate and overdone, in execrable taste. I was ashamed of the thought the next minute for she said, with such evident pleasure:

"We've all been looking forward so to seeing you again, we haven't been able to talk of anything else, ever since your father's first letter came. I hope Lorna does come soon, so that we can get off. We'll have a glorious run up the Sound."

"When shall we reach Sunset Island?" I asked, as I turned to my dressing-bag. "I've never been around Cape Cod, but it isn't very far, is it?"

"Oh, no, only Mother insists that we just creep along at night. She's a dreadful coward on the water, you know. We'll reach there tomorrow afternoon, if we start soon."

"It must be beautiful," I remarked. "Is it a sort of summer colony? Are there other people near?"

"Yes, quite near, but they're not—we don't associate very much with them.—Oh, Mother's calling me! I'll send the maid to you."

"You needn't trouble, Bijou—"I began, but she had gone. Her ears must have been sharper than mine, for I hadn't heard Aunt Julie.

I laid out my little white serge suit, and deck shoes, but when the trim French maid appeared, I sent her away again. I wanted a minute to myself, to think. Now that I had seen and talked with Bijou again, I felt I remembered her more clearly than any of the rest of the family. Her face was so familiar to me that I wondered if perhaps I had seen her somewhere lately, not knowing, of course, who she was. It would have been funny if I had, wouldn't it?

She was quite tall and willowy, with a superb figure, and far prettier than the little Bijou had given promise of being, but the shape of her face hadn't changed any, it was just as doll-like and expressionless as

ever, and with her artificiality she reminded me of a mannequin in a smart couturier's. I didn't want to be catty, even in my thoughts, but I was sure her hair was yellower than it used to be when she was a little girl, and no one could help noticing how obviously she was painted and made-up, and, oh, those nails!

Aunt Julie came down while I was changing, and after a while I went up on deck with her. Alaric was reading, and Bijou and Monsieur Pelissier were standing very close together at the port rail talking earnestly.

They started apart in some confusion when we appeared. Bijou wore a sulky injured expression, and Monsieur Pelissier's eyes were fairly snapping. I wondered if they had been quarrelling.

"We won't wait luncheon for Lorna," Aunt Julie announced. "I told Parke to serve it as soon as it was ready. You must be starved, Maida child."

I hadn't noticed it before, but the swift ride in the motor through the fresh air, and the sharp, salty breeze on the river, had given me an appetite like a country girl's.

Alaric dropped his book and came forward.

"Do you like the *Tortoise*, Maida?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" I cried. "She's like an exquisite floating doll's house, a miniature palace. It must be lovely to live on board for weeks, and go wherever you like."

"You wouldn't go far in a lifetime," Alaric laughed, dropping into a low chair beside me, and displaying as he did so an astonishing length of lavender silk sock. "You wouldn't live long enough to get anywhere! The way she crawls——"

"That's why Alaric insisted on naming her the *Tortoise*," Aunt Julie interrupted. "She is slow, of course, but I think she's sure. We've been to Bermuda on her twice——"

"She's safe as a scow," affirmed Alaric. "Well, Maida, what do you think of us? Have we changed very much?"

"Oh, no, I should have recognized Aunt Julie and Bijou at once," I replied, but Alaric did look so lazily self-satisfied that I could not help adding, "although, do you know, Alaric, I scarcely remember you at all."

Alaric look reproachful, and then Aunt Julie exclaimed:

"Oh, children, what do you think? Maida remembered my brooch, the very first thing! Think of it, this old pin your dear father gave me so many years ago!"

She said it with quite an air of triumph, and Monsieur Pelissier remarked:

"Memory is a strange thing, is it not? It is—how do you say?—tricky. One can recall without trouble the most trivial, insignificant things, when sometimes

important facts have gone from one's mind for always."

At luncheon I found myself seated between Aunt Julie and Alaric, and I was glad of it. I'd taken a decided aversion to Monsieur Pelissier, even in those first few moments. He was superior to the Smith family, of course, one could easily see that, but he seemed a little bit too suave, too ingratiatingly smooth.

I put him down at once in my mind as one of the innumerable army of fortune hunters, and wondered which of the two girls he was trying to interest. I fancied it was Bijou, but then I had not yet had an opportunity to observe his manner with Lorna.

Alaric drank two cocktails and ate enormously, leaving me quite to my own devices, with the air of one who had done his share of the welcome, and was glad it was over. The luncheon was irreproachably cooked and served, but the others ate scarcely anything, and sat as if they were waiting for something to happen. There would be a pause, and then everyone would begin to talk at once, with a spasmodic gaiety, only to fall silent again, as if some suspense were dragging at them. I began to wonder about Lorna. We were turning to the deck, when there was a hail from the wharf.

"There she is, the naughty girl!" cried Aunt Julie, in obvious relief. "She deserves a cold lunch!"

A slender figure in a very chic dark blue tailored

gown had descended from a taxi, and was stepping into the dinghy which had already reached the wharf. I watched it curiously as it turned and approached, thinking of the hot-tempered, harum-scarum little gypsy of a creature I had known, and wondering what she would be like now.

"Whatever kept you so long, Lorna!" Aunt Julie scolded, as the slim figure mounted to the deck. "We've waited hours for you—Good Heavens!"

I think we all saw it at the same moment that she did. There was a great jagged tear in the girl's skirt and one sleeve was hanging almost torn from her coat.

"I am very sorry, but it could not be helped," the girl replied rather stiffly, adding: "I have been in an accident, a taxi smash-up!"

"You are hurt!" Monsieur Pelissier started solicitously forward.

"No, I—escaped," she paused curiously before the last word, her eyes holding his. "I have not seen him."

She uttered the last sentence in a low, significant tone, and her mother cried anxiously.

"An accident! Oh, Lorna——"

But the girl had turned, coming straight to me with out-stretched hands.

"And this is our little friend of long ago!" she exclaimed, kissing me on both cheeks, in a pretty, for-

eign fashion which somehow in her did not seem at all affected. "I am sorry, Maida, that I was not here to greet you when you came, but I am as truly glad to see you as the rest. More glad, if that is possible."

Lorna was as tall as Bijou, but the resemblance ended there. Her hair was soft and dark, like a misty cloud, her eyes large and heavy-lidded, and her clear olive skin was as smooth as ivory, with no trace of color in her face except the crimson line of her lips.

I kissed her in return, with impulsive warmth. I felt drawn to her, somehow, from the beginning. She interested me, even then, and I was sure we should be good friends.

"I hope you were not hurt!" I said. "You must have been horribly frightened."

"Oh, no!" she returned with a little laugh. "I suffered no ill effects except my ruined gown, as you see."

She drew off her gloves as she spoke, and I observed that her hands were slender and shapely, and the nails perfectly cared for. Indeed, save for the ravages of the accident, she was a consistent picture,—from the trim smart lines of her small hat to her strictly correct walking boots—of a flawlessly groomed, well bred young woman.

Monsieur Pellissier came and took her hand ceremoniously.



"It was cruel of you, Lorna!" he murmured, in that caressing voice of his. "You gave to us all a *mauvaise quarte d'heure*."

"We certainly did have a good long wait for you!" remarked Alaric. "Mother thought you had been kidnapped!"

He turned to the rail, laughing boisterously at his own stupid joke, but nobody appeared to notice it except Bijou, who giggled inanely.

"No, I don't want any lunch," Lorna said, in reply to a suggestion of her mother's. "I'm too tired and shaken up to eat. I'll have a cup of tea here on deck as soon as I've changed, and Maida shall talk to me. You have had her all to yourselves, and now it's my turn. I will be with you again in a few minutes."

She ran lightly down the companionway, and reappeared presently in a soft immaculate white linen gown.

"It is too bad you couldn't go to Europe with your father, as you had planned," she said, as she sipped her tea. "But his loss is our gain. I'm sure you will love Sunset Island. It must be dismally bleak and windswept in winter, but now it is delightful, and Hard-a-lee is such a quaint old place. Mother had it remodeled you know, from an ancient house which has stood there for ages, and one part of the original, which is still un-

touched, was built from a wreck which went ashore there almost before we were born, I think! Then, too, there is an old ruined lighthouse on the point, which the government abandoned years ago."

"It sounds delightful," I replied. "Daddy will enjoy it all just like a great big boy, when he comes next week."

"Ah, yes——" began Lorna, but Alaric interrupted with an exclamation of satisfaction.

"There! We're off at last!"

The afternoon was lovely and sunshiny, with little flecks of white clouds floating over head, and just enough breeze to be pleasant.

Aunt Julie had made me put on a pair of smoked glasses like hers and I was glad of it, although I knew how disfiguring they must be, for the sun-glare on the water was rather trying.

Lorna went below, after she had finished her tea, and Aunt Julie followed her down immediately, while Bijou dropped into the vacant chair beside me.

"The line of skyscrapers is wonderful, isn't it?" I remarked. "Just fancy how it must impress a foreigner when he catches his first glimpse of it, coming up the bay!"

"Yes, it is," agreed Bijou, without enthusiasm. "I suppose we don't think very much about it, because we're so used to it."

Monsieur Pelissier passed us with a courtly little bow, and descended to the salon, and a moment later, the delicate, whimsical strains of Chaminade's "Flatterer" rippled up to us from the piano.

I turned to Bijou with a little exclamation of pleasure.

"Raoul plays nicely, doesn't he?" she said. "He won't play any popular things, though, only that classical stuff. I don't care for it, do you?"

"Yes, I do," I said, slowly. "You play, don't you?"

She shrugged.

"They tried to teach me at the convent, but I hated it so, I wouldn't practise. I think it's a waste of time when you can just stick a roll in a player-piano, and grind out something you like."

I was silent from sheer annoyance. I love music. Monsieur Pelissier played with a sure touch and faultless technique, but there was a metallic brilliancy about his execution utterly without feeling, a sort of purely mental expression, lacking in any soul quality. The "Flatterer" tinkled to an end, and then, after a slight pause, the lilting melody of "Anitra's Dance" stole out on the air.

Suddenly it was drowned in a blare of syncopation. We were passing a crowded Coney Island boat, with dingy flags fluttering, brass band braying, and a teeming mass of humanity packed against

the rail, shouting and waving at us as we passed.

I fairly shuddered as I glanced at it, and then a sudden whimsical thought came to me.

"Just think, Bijou," I said. "If our fathers hadn't struck oil, we might be on that boat now, instead of here, and thinking that we were having a wonderful time!"

Bijou looked curiously at me.

"You're a funny girl, Maida," she observed, at last. "You're not a bit stuck-up, are you?"

"Stuck-up?" I repeated, in surprise. "No, I hope I'm not snobbish. Why should I be?"

"Oh, I don't know." She looked away as she spoke. "I was a little afraid you'd be. Lots of girls would in our position, you know, and then it's so long since I've seen you."

"Do you think I've changed very much?" I demanded, in my turn.

She shook her head.

"No, you don't seem to have," she replied, rather doubtfully. "Not in looks, anyway. Oh, you're older, of course, but you are just like you were when we were little.—I wonder why mother and Lorna and Raoul don't come up on deck? It's stuffy in the salon."

The piano had been silent since the Coney Island band had drowned it out, and now a low steady murmur of voices came up from below.

Bijou was tapping petulantly on the arm of her chair, with her glittering, pen-pointed nails, and it got on my nerves. There was something monotonous and maddening about that insistent tapping, like a telegraph instrument, or a typewriter. It ceased abruptly, as if she were suddenly aware of my annoyed, involuntary attention.

One of the sailors passed us with his swift cat-like tread, and I glanced idly up to find his eyes fixed unmistakably on me, with a curious intensity of expression. It was one of the men who had rowed us out in the dinghy, a bronzed young giant with a mop of hair faded almost tow-color by the sun, and very round, bold eyes.

It was late, and quite dark when we went below to dress for dinner. Lorna and Bijou shared the cabin next mine, and Alaric and Monsieur Pelissier were across the companionway. Aunt Julie occupied the large stateroom amidships, forward of ours, which stretched from port to starboard.

Monsieur Pelissier talked brilliantly during dinner. He was really fascinating to listen to, in spite of my odd, instinctive feeling of aversion. It seemed to me that there was a vindictive, cruel expression about his thin lips, and his high, aquiline nose was thin, too, while his ears were crumpled and flat against his sleek head, and almost lobeless.

He was apparently much older than Alaric, about thirty, I fancied, and although Aunt Julie had spoken of him as her son's friend, they seemed to have little in common, and weren't at all companionable. I didn't see how two such dissimilar types could be very congenial.

After dinner we sat on deck for a while in the moonlight, but the cold wind, which had sprung up with the coming of night, soon drove us below. All but Alaric, who stayed above, smoking.

Bijou ground out some ragtime with the player attachment on the piano, to her own evident satisfaction, and Monsieur proposed bridge.

We played until eleven, then Aunt Julie suggested that Monsieur Pelissier mix some famous punch of his own invention. So they brought out the great cut-glass bowl and thin-stemmed glasses. Monsieur Pelissier turned up his cuffs, and said, with the mock air of a professional magician:

"To show you, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no deception——"

"Do be sensible, Raoul!" exclaimed Lorna, impatiently. "My head aches frightfully. I'm going up on deck for a breath of air."

He blocked the way, playfully, with outspread arms.

"Not before my wonderful punch!" he coaxed. "It will make your headache disappear—poof! like

that!—There is magic in it, I assure you, Miss Waring,” he went on as he turned again to the bowl. “It banishes all unpleasant thoughts and induces sweet dreams. You shall see!”

Lorna shrugged, and dropped into a chair by the piano.

“Who could have unpleasant thoughts on such a perfect night as this?” she murmured, but rather listlessly.

“I have an unpleasant suspicion that I shall be seasick tomorrow,” observed Aunt Julie.

“You’re always afraid of seasickness, mother, but you know you are never sick,” Bijou consoled her lazily. “Besides, tomorrow afternoon we shall reach Hard-a-lee.”

Monsieur Pelissier presented us with our glasses, then raised his on high.

“A toast, ladies!” he cried, with sparkling eyes and a little flush mounting in his sallow cheeks. “To Sunset Island, and golden hours at Hard-a-lee!”

“To the ties of old friendship!” amended Lorna, softly. “May they be drawn closer and bound fast!”

We talked for a little while longer, but soon said goodnight and went to our cabin. I was terribly sleepy. The exciting events of the long day, and the hours in the open air with the fresh breezes

blowing, had combined to weigh my eyelids down like lead. My last conscious thought was an idly and wholly impertinent speculation as to why they had all been so terribly anxious about Lorna's delayed return, and whom she had meant when she reached the yacht, and said to Monsieur Pellissier in that curiously even tone: "I have not seen him."



### CHAPTER III.

#### *Lorna.*

WHEN I awoke the sun was shining so brightly in my face that it made my eyes ache. I lay gazing about me, wondering, in the first bewildered moment of conscious thought, where I was, and how I got there. The events of the previous day had faded from my mind, and I fancied seepily that I was still at Miss Farmingdale's, and wondered at the unfamiliar outlines of the furniture, and why the floor seemed to sway so. Then it all came back to me, and for a time I lay there quietly, thinking.

I was unhappy and depressed. I couldn't help feeling that the Smiths weren't my sort of people any more, or I wasn't theirs. Something was wrong. Either they or I had changed so that we had grown hopelessly away from the old familiar footing. The thought of spending the whole summer alone with them on an island, in intimate daily

association, was intolerable. I determined that when Daddy came the following week, I would talk it all over with him, and coax him to take me away. I felt a little better when I had come to my decision.

As I sat up my locket slipped to the floor and I saw that the chain was broken. I couldn't understand this, for I had worn that locket and chain ever since I was eight years old, when I tried to follow Daddy from the hotel and might have been lost if the house detective had not seen me. Daddy had the chain made and fastened on my neck without clasps, and too small to slip over my head. In the locket, which had a secret spring known only to Daddy and me, was a picture of himself and, engraved on the inside of the case was an inscription, giving Daddy's name and permanent address. Although fine, the chain was remarkably strong and I couldn't understand its breaking. I hoped Aunt Julie knew some place where I could have it repaired at once.

I rang for the maid, and presently she appeared, with a steaming breakfast tray. Just as I was preparing to go up on deck, Bijou tapped at the door.

"Good morning, Maida," she said. "Did you sleep well?"

"Rather too well," I replied. "I'm afraid I've

overslept myself. I feel a little dull and headachy, and it must be very late."

"Oh, no. It's never late with us! We don't pretend to keep any regular hours, you know, especially on the *Tortoise*. We all come straggling up on deck whenever we feel like it."

"Let's go up now. It's a glorious day!"

It was glorious. The sun was high, and the clear, blue waves danced and curled into little serpentine ridges of foam, that scattered and spread like old lace. A low, unbroken line of shore lay far in the distance over the port-rail, and a flock of sea-gulls followed in our wake, their wings tipped with silver as they swooped and turned in the sunlight.

All the rest had preceded us, and they gathered about at once. I asked Aunt Julie about having my chain repaired and she was quite confident it could be done at once—Monsieur Pelissier could join the broken ends. He secured a tool from the engine room and I was forced to tolerate his close presence while he deftly secured the chain about my neck.

"You value your locket greatly?" he queried tentatively.

"Yes," I replied. He seemed disappointed at my curt answer and thanks, but I couldn't like him. However, he was especially attentive, and brought

me cushions, a rug for my feet, smelling-salts, bonbons and books, until, in self-defence, I beat a retreat with Alaric.

We played a game of quoits under the awnings and I won an easy victory. Then I went back to Aunt Julie, who sat near the door to the companionway, with some perfectly atrocious embroidery in her hands. There was now no sign of Lorna or Monsieur Pelissier, but Bijou joined us.

"We'll reach Sunset Island between four and five o'clock this afternoon, Captain Andrews tells me," observed Aunt Julie, snapping her thread, and frowning at the mess she had made of a purple petunia. "I hope you'll like it, Maida. It's quiet, of course, for it's three miles from the mainland, and no one lives on the island, but it's cool and pleasant, and the girls like it after the excitement of the winter."

Bijou gave an impatient little twitch in her chair, but didn't say anything. I had my doubts about her preference for a quiet summer on a lonely island.

"Dear, dear!" Aunt Julie ejaculated, reflectively, "if dear Margaret was only here! If she could know that her baby was with us now, how happy she would be! You remember your mother well, Maida?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, of course!" I cried, distressed.

How could she think I had forgotten in twelve short years the dearest face in all the world!

I still shrank from speaking of my mother to them. Aunt Julie meant well, of course, but it was intolerable, with Bijou's lazy unfeeling eyes gazing at me. I would have felt differently perhaps, if it had been Lorna.

"It was a great blow to us all." Aunt Julie shook her head sadly, and then with an intuition I wouldn't have given her credit for possessing, she added, briskly, "Well, we won't talk about sorrowful things on a lovely morning like this.

"The old days, back in Concho County, were good days after all."

"How you talk, mother!" remarked Bijou, disgustedly. "I don't remember much about it, and I don't want to! This is the life I like. I don't care to think of the time before. We're rich, now!"

She spoke as if their wealth might have dated from the day before, and the sinister gloating triumph of her voice was like her mother's, when she had spoken about the power of money. It grated upon my nerves horribly, and I turned quickly to her.

"Money is useful, of course. It makes everything smooth and easy for you to do what you want to do, but I don't think it is so terribly important for one's happiness, do you?"

"Yes, I do!" she returned, promptly. "To do what I want! To see life!"

"Do you care so much for society, then?" I asked.

"Society? No, I hate it, the society you mean." Bijou's eyes glittered. "But the theaters, and restaurants, and the races, and dressing better than anybody else, and going to Paris, and just living in motor cars! That's what I want."

"But you've had it ever since you were a little girl!" I said, in surprise. "The pretty things, I mean, and motors, and Paris!"

"Oh, of course!" She reddened sulkily and moved again in her chair with an impatient flounce. "But a child can't have much fun in Paris, in a convent. Don't you love public places, and having everybody nudge each other, and stare at you as you pass, and whisper: 'That's Maida Waring, Oil-Well Waring's daughter'!"

"But I don't think people do! At least, I never noticed it. I should detest it, I'm sure. I couldn't bear to be conspicuous!" I cried in dismay at the thought.

Bijou looked incredulously at me, as if she were wondering whether I really meant it, or if it were a pose.

"Well, you're funny!" she remarked, "I should love it! I wouldn't be like that for anything!"

Hastily Aunt Julie interrupted.

"Bijou's a——a Philistine, Maida! Don't mind her! I'm afraid I've been too lax with the girls and spoiled them, but a mother doesn't seem to have much control over her children, these days."

She spoke pleasantly enough, but she looked warning daggers at Bijou, who shrugged rebelliously, and seemed to be secretly enjoying her mother's discomfiture.

Monsieur Pelissier came up just then, and Aunt Julie went below to see that the maid attended to the packing.

Monsieur Pelissier knew so many interesting things about old, forgotten, out-of-the-way corners of Paris, that it fascinated me, in spite of myself, to listen to him, and it was lunch time before I realized it.

After lunch, I wandered on deck to the stern, and stood at the rail. The shore line was perceptibly nearer now, and was passed a great gaunt rock, with a lighthouse on it, and then several little wooded islands, upon which I could faintly discern white blotches of houses.

Someone came up behind me, hesitated, then advanced to my side.

"Beg pardon, Miss Smith. You dropped your handkerchief."

I turned quickly. It was the bronzed, fair-haired young sailor with the bold eyes, whom I had no-

ticed the day before. He stood staring at me again in that peculiar way, and to my annoyance, I left my face flush beneath his scrutiny, although his bearing was not disrespectful.

"Thank you," I said quietly, taking the handkerchief from his hand, and added on impulse: "But I am Miss Waring, not Miss Smith.

"Beg pardon, Miss. I'm a new hand, and I didn't know." He touched his forehead with his finger and moved off quietly, and I turned again to the water.

He had stared at me so curiously, and had seemed to be on the point of saying more, but had checked himself. I wondered what he would have said.

"It's very pretty, the coast here, isn't it?" Lorna had come up, and was leaning on the rail beside me. "It is quite rugged and picturesque when we approach Sunset Island, not unlike some parts of the coast of Brittany."

"I know very little of France," I returned. "I only saw the points of interest in and about Paris that the average tourist goes in for, when I went over with Miss Farmingdale and the girls. You like France, don't you?"

"Ah, yes, I love it!" cried Lorna, eagerly. "I would live there always, if I could, and never come to America. I mean to, some day."



I wondered if she referred to a possible marriage with Monsieur Pelissier. I hoped not, for I did not think he was the sort of man to make any girl happy. I fancied he could be cuttingly satirical, and even cruel, if he wished.

"France must be a fascinating country, of course," I said slowly. "But to leave America forever, not to want to see one's own country again, I can't imagine that!"

"Ah, wait till you know France well! This is not life, here in America, you do not know how to live!" She spoke as if she were already an expatriate. "The money is here, of course, the wealth, but nothing else, nothing! No art, no beauty, no *esprit*, no *joie de vivre*!"

She paused, and as I was silent, she added, laughingly:

"I shock you, Maida? I seem traitorously unpatriotic. Really, I'm not. I know this is a wonderful country, but France suits my temperament best. Mother and Bijou cannot understand."

"No," I said thoughtfully. "You are different from the rest of the family, Lorna, different from what you used to be when you were a little girl."

"Do you think so?" she asked, quickly. "How different?"

"I don't know. I can't explain." I hesitated. "It isn't only that you are older, now, but you seem

to have lived, to have learned more from life than it has taught me yet, or—Bijou.”

“Oh, Bijou!” she exclaimed, quite frankly. “Bijou always was stupid, you know! She’s hopelessly like mother. That sounds undutiful, but although we are sisters, we haven’t an idea in common. We’re a queer family, I suppose.”

“People can’t all be of the same type, you know, even in one family,” I remarked, rather uncomfortably. Lorna had a peculiar way, which I learned to recognize later, of letting all conversational bars down, in the most unconventional fashion. One scarcely knew how to reply to her.

She didn’t appear to have noticed my banal observation, however, but turned to me with a little confidential air.

“Maida, did mother seem very anxious yesterday, when you reached the yacht, and found I had not returned?”

“Yes, she did,” I returned, candidly.

“How silly!” she exclaimed. “You can never convince Mother of a thing! I suppose it must have seemed very queer to you, her anxiety and fussing?”

“Oh, no!” I parried. “She wanted to sail as soon as possible, you know. That was why she called for me at the school earlier than had been arranged.”

Lorna nodded.

"I know. But that wasn't altogether what made her worry." She paused, and then added, impetuously: "I'm going to tell you something, Maida. Did—did your father ever know, and tell you—of my engagement, two years ago?"

"No," I said, surprised. "I heard nothing of it. Was it announced?"

"No. That was why I thought perhaps you had not heard. It was Dickie Ranger, Senator Ranger's son. He was attached to the embassy—we were living in Paris then. We were quite terribly in love, too violently to last. We quarreled, and Dickie had himself ordered back to Washington. Well, I've been seeing him again; mother found it out and it upset her terribly. She has other plans for me, and she's desperately afraid I will make it up with Dickie. We've had some horrid rows because I wouldn't give up seeing him, but I'm too old to be dictated to——"

"You're only twenty-two——" I interrupted.

"Yes, I know, but mother and I see things so differently! Now you can understand why she was so worried and alarmed at my continued absence. The worst of it is, she makes other people believe her, too!"

I understood at once, in a flash, all that she had implied, and knew whom she meant by "other

people." It explained her reassurance to Monsieur Pelissier when she came on board the previous day: "I have not seen him." Evidently the Frenchman knew of her former engagement, and was aware that she still liked this Dickie Ranger, in a friendly way, if no more. It was quite probable that Monsieur Pelissier might be jealous of the other man.

"I can understand why Aunt Julie was worried," I laughed, "just at the last minute, too, when she almost had you safe on Sunset Island for the summer."

"Yes. I believe my friendship for Dickie is the cause of her sudden resolve to spend the whole season immured up here."

"And you're quite sure you don't really care just a little for this Mr. Ranger?"

"Indeed, no! If you'd ever been in love you wouldn't ask me that!" she laughed, then added, swiftly, "you haven't, have you, Maida?"

"Been in love? Goodness gracious, no! I have never thought of marrying." I could feel my cheeks flush at the very idea. Then I remembered something, and giggled. "Oh, there is what you might call a vague possibility, but the man hasn't the least idea of it himself, and I've never even seen him!"

"If he has not the slightest idea of marrying you,

Lorna nodded.

"I know. But that wasn't altogether what her worry." She paused, and then added, "I'm going to tell you something, Dick—did your father ever know, and tell of my engagement, two years ago?"

"No," I said, surprised. "I heard nothing. Was it announced?"

"No. That was why I thought perhaps I had not heard. It was Dickie Ranger's son. He was attached to the Ranger's son. He was attached to the Ranger's son. We were living in Paris then. We were terribly in love, too violently to last. Dickie had himself ordered to Washington. Well, I've been seeing my mother found it out and it upset her. She has other plans for me, and she's determined I will make it up with Dickie. We've had horrid rows because I wouldn't marry him, but I'm too old to be dictated to."

"You're only twenty-two——" I said.

"Yes, I know, but mother and I think differently! Now you can understand how I was so worried and alarmed at the news. The worst of it is, she may not believe her, too!"

I understood at once, in a flash, what she implied, and knew whom she

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I should call it the very vaguest possibility under the sun!" Lorna laughed. "Who is he?"

"His name is Gilbert Spear, and he is the son of Arnold Spear."

"Arnold Spear, the Consolidated Oil magnate?" Lorna asked, with wide eyes. "He is quite a catch, isn't he?"

"I suppose so," I said, rather shortly. "Daddy and his father are great chums, and from some blundering hints which Daddy has thrown out, I think they've fixed it up between them, in a nice, old-fashioned, high-handed way. I wouldn't marry him, of course, if he was the last man on earth, just because of that. He's a queer sort of chap, I believe, always going off on long trips to the out-of-the-way corners of the earth by himself. He is in India, or South Africa, or somewhere, so he won't trouble me very soon! I wouldn't marry anybody now. All I want is to make up to Daddy as much as anyone can, for the loss of dear mother. It almost killed him when she left us, Lorna."

"I do not wonder!" Lorna's voice was very low and hushed. "She was a lovely, lovely woman, your mother, Maida."

"You remember her?" I asked eagerly.

"Do you think I could ever forget her?" Lorna cried, softly. "You were too young to realize it at the time, but she saved my life, once, at the

risk of her own. How could I ever forget that?"

"Oh, I do remember, I do!" The tears sprang to my eyes, and I laid my hand impulsively on Lorna's. "It was that time on the ranch when you were bitten by the rattlesnake.

"And your mother drew the poison from the wound with her own lips," finished Lorna, when I couldn't go on. "It was a heroic thing to do, the bravest thing I ever heard of a woman having done in my life. Do you wonder, Maida, that I love your mother's memory?"

I cried a little, I couldn't help it, but they were happy tears.

"Oh, I am so glad that you remember her!" I said at last, when I could speak. "I've been so lonely without her, so unspeakably lonely!"

Lorna was silent for a time, looking straight off to sea. A little flush had come into her usually colorless face, and her eyes had a faraway, inscrutable look.

At length she spoke, very quietly and gently, and told me many things from the last years of mother's life,—just little incidents, but glorified in the telling by her sympathetic voice, and rendered doubly dear to me. There were things, too, which had completely gone from my memory, and I listened absorbedly, happier than I had been for ever so long.



The afternoon slipped by without my knowing, and I started in surprise when Aunt Julie called to me.

"Look, Maida!" she said. "There, to your left—that long island between the two smaller ones. We're here at last! There's Hard-a-lee!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### *Hard-a-lee.*

**A** LOW, squat, grayish rock, as square as a monument, and crowned with a sparse growth of pines, rose out of the water just off the port bow ; far ahead, a level, vividly green disk, with clumps of trees here and there upon it, lay like a partly submerged meadow, and between the two oddly dissimilar islands, a larger one lay basking in the afternoon sun.

At the end nearest to us, a great, gray mass of stone jutted out into the water, its walls rising steeply, like a cliff. On the loftiest, outmost point the ruins of an old lighthouse reared itself, staunchly, pathetically courageous, like a superannuated hero, its useless, dismantled old head held high in the pride of past achievements. From the back of the promontory, the ground, thickly wooded, sloped down gradually to the water's level, at the farther end of the island, its edge bordered

by a rocky, rugged little beach, upon which the low surf rolled.

I saw no indication of a house through the heavily massed trees, as we glided with diminishing speed along the island's length, but when we rounded the shelving beach at the northern end, a little cry of delight escaped me. There, between two narrow peninsulas of scrub and sand lay a little cove, its waters as blue and placid and crystal-clear as those of a lake, and on the horseshoe curve of the shore, the soft white sand lay smooth and glistening in the sun. Behind it, the densely packed foliage of towering oaks and pines was bisected by a winding, cedar-strewn path, and the tall veranda columns of a spacious colonial house gleamed whitely through the trees.

I went hastily below, for a last look about my cabin, to see that nothing had been forgotten, and when I came on deck again, I saw Alaric standing apart at the starboard rail, deep in conversation with one of the sailors. It was the sailor who had watched me so oddly.

I paused involuntarily, in surprise, and at that moment the sailor said:

"Yes, sir. Two years ago, on the *Neptunic*, and a year before that, on the *Saxonia*. I never forget a face, sir."

His tone was low and significant, but not so

low that the word did not come to me distinctly. There could be no mistake about the man's manner now. It was not only disrespectful, but positively insolent. He looked up and saw me, and leaning nearer to Alaric, said something quickly which was inaudible to my ears.

I hurried away to the port rail, where the rest were gathered, and instantly the little scene which I had inadvertently come upon passed from my mind.

A trim little houseboat, looking more like a miniature yacht club than anything else, nestled in a curve of the beach, and a short broad dock ran out from it, beside which a smart little launch, glistening with new paint, and a slender, torpedo shaped racing motorboat rode at anchor. It was a perfect little haven of peace and beauty, and coming upon it so suddenly it was almost like a scene in a play.

"I knew you would like it, Maida," Aunt Julie said, at my exclamation of pleasure. "Just wait till you see the house! Gracious! I'm glad to be home again!"

We left the *Tortoise*, and were rowed ashore in the dinghy, Aunt Julie, Alaric and myself going first, and Lorna and Bijou following with Monsieur Pelissier on the second trip.

We had had a delightful run in the yacht, but it

was pleasant to step ashore, and feel firm ground beneath one's feet once more, and inhale the fresh tarry odor of balsam and spruce and pine. I could scarcely realize that we had left New York only the day before; it seemed as if we had been at sea much longer than a mere twenty-four hours, so many impressions had crowded in upon me.

The curving path leading up to the house was longer than it had seemed at the first glance from the yacht, and the house itself loomed larger as we approached it, our feet sinking deep with each step into the soft fragrant carpet of pine needles. Low huckleberry and sumac bushes, sassafras and wintergreen scrub, and oak and maple shoots grew thickly between the serried ranks of the trees, and I observed that although the semblance of its natural sylvan wildness had been maintained, the woods had been carefully cleared and pruned, and its picturesqueness artfully intensified and accentuated by cleverly massed groupings of rock, over which luxuriant, vividly colored vines trailed, and by rustic seats and grottoes and summer houses placed here and there.

The house, oddly enough for such a locality, had been planned consistently in the colonial style, most frequently seen now in old mansions of the South. Its broad, shady veranda was two stories high, and a wide hall ran down the center of the house, with

great, square rooms opening from it on either side. The straight wide staircase led to a gallery, which reached all around the hall on the second floor, and formed a landing from which the bedroom doors opened.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Macpherson, a pleasant faced middle-aged Scotchwoman met us in the entrance hall, but Aunt Julie herself showed me to my room, which was perfectly enormous. It contained a great, fourposted bed and massive dressers and highboys of black walnut, but the heavy furniture seemed almost lost in its immense space. Quaint, vivid-lined chintz draperies on the bed and at the low windows added bright, cheerful touches, and a huge cut-glass bowl of early June roses on the table filled the air about with its fragrance.

"Would you like to lie down for awhile?" suggested Aunt Julie. "We'll have tea on the veranda, but yours will be sent to you, if you like. I hope you will be comfortable."

"Oh, I'm sure I shall!" I hastened to assure her, adding laughingly, "if I don't get lost! I never saw such a huge bedroom! It would provide sleeping quarters for a family!"

Aunt Julie laughed, too.

"I made up my mind I'd have one house with rooms large enough to suit me!" she remarked. "I feel cramped and stuffy in a little bedroom,

and the town house in Chicago seems narrow and confined, even if it is almost the biggest on the Lake Drive. I don't suppose you remember our ranch in Concho County."

"Indeed I do!" I interrupted her. "The Circle Four! The whole county used to gather for dances in the big living-room, and we children would sneak out of bed and peep in at them! I'll never forget old black Sam's squeaky fiddle, and 'Gene's 'cello —"

"Your memory will be an embarrassing asset some day, Maida! Poor old Sam and 'Gene! I wonder what's become of them! Dead long ago, I suppose. —Well, I'll go and see how my own room looks. I left orders to have it done over since last year. I'll send Lucie to you."

"Oh, no. Please don't trouble. I really shan't need her," I said. "I will be down in ten minutes."

I didn't like that beady-eyed Frenchwoman, either, although she was a clever, capable maid. She was respectful enough, but she had a sneering, ironical expression which made me sure she would be impudent if she dared, and she stared at me, when she thought I wasn't looking at her, until I grew vaguely uncomfortable. It may have been unjust, but in my mind I questioned her honesty, and I never let her see where I put my jewels at night.

I went to one of the windows and looked out. It was high up under the veranda roof, and commanded a view of its entire length, which seemed almost a quarter of a mile, from where I looked down upon it. Rugs and wicker furniture and boxes of ferns and flowering plants grouped upon it robbed it of the atmosphere of barrack-like bareness which would otherwise have pervaded it. A man servant appeared, wheeling a tea-wagon, and began arranging the chairs about a low table, and I turned away from the window, and opened my dressing bag.

Lorna was alone on the veranda when I descended, but I caught a glimpse of Bijou's white gown between the trees, and Monsieur Pelissier's figure beside her. Lorna looked suddenly tired. She was paler than ever, and there were dark, shadowy circles about her eyes.

She looked up with a smile as I approached, and closed the book she had been reading. I glanced at the cover and saw with surprise that it was a treatise on chemistry.

"You are interested in that?" I asked. She laid the book on the table with a whimsical shrug.

"I found it upstairs,—one of our guests last summer, an inventor of a sort, left it when he went away. I like chemistry, I used to dabble in it quite a little, at school. I've sometimes thought I should



like to make a study of it, like Madame Curie,—or Lucretia Borgia!" she added laughing.

"I don't know much about it," I said. "I very nearly blew myself up once, in the laboratory at Miss Farmingdale's and it quite discouraged me from further experiments. Lucretia Borgia was a very terrible person, wasn't she?"

"She'd have been a genius in any vocation," Lorna replied. "And if it hadn't been for that little criminal warp in her mind, we might read of her in a different light. I have a certain amount of sympathy for her."

"I have not!" I said, with a little shiver. "The idea of any crime is horribly repugnant to me. But a woman like that—a hand that caresses you and strikes in the dark! A creature who worms herself into your confidence under the guise of friendship and then betrays you! Such a person is unspeakably low and vile, and a coward, too."

"No!" cried Lorna. "Not a coward, at least! It is not cowardly to fight with the only weapons society has left you! If you have only your wits, you are not to blame if you are forced to use them, in any way you can!"

I looked at her curiously, surprised at her vehemence. "You're a queer girl, Lorna! Where do you ever get such funny thoughts?"

She shrugged again.

"I'm going to give you your tea now," she remarked, with a change of tone. "We won't wait for mother. She's probably found a speck of dust somewhere, and is hauling somebody over the coals for it!"

"The house looks charmingly in order," I said. "Quite as if it had been occupied for weeks."

"The servants came by rail a week ago, all except our own maids, to make everything ready for us."

"Oh, there you are, children!" Aunt Julie appeared with Alaric in the doorway. "I'm glad Lorna didn't let you wait for your tea, Maida. I had to see the housekeeper. Bijou! Bijou!"

They joined us, coming slowly at her call, and talking earnestly in lowered tones until they reached the very steps of the veranda. Then they separated abruptly, and Bijou seated herself near her mother, while the Frenchman drew a chair very close to Lorna's, and leaning toward her almost caressingly, murmured something in a soft voice.

Lorna made no reply. She stared at him coolly, steadily for a long minute, and under her searching look he flushed redly and seemed to flinch, and turned his head away. She smiled at that, a slow, almost contemptuous smile, but it seemed to me that her lips trembled slightly as her eyes wandered out to the woodland, which crept up nearly to the

veranda, and lingered, as if its somber, green depths rested and eased them.

I was puzzled by this bit of by-play. I had not been able to decide which of the two girls Monsieur Pelissier had chosen as the object of his probably mercenary affections, for he seemed equally attentive to both, but Lorna's constantly changing attitude toward him bewildered me. It seemed sometimes as if she disliked him almost as much as I did, and yet at others there was an eager air of possession about her when she looked at him, which I could not fathom.

"What were you two children talking about so earnestly?" asked Aunt Julie. I thought she was addressing Bijou and Monsieur Pelissier until I glanced up and found she was gazing at me over the rim of her tea-cup.

"Crime," I answered succinctly.

Aunt Julie jumped.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed. "Whatever started you on such a subject!—I hope nothing is missing!" she added, turning to Lorna in swift alarm. "Have you noticed that anything has disappeared? I haven't had time to go over the plate. Mrs. Macpherson says everything is all right——"

"You needn't be alarmed, mother," replied Lorna indifferently. "The crimes we were discussing were committed several hundred years ago. Everything

is so petty nowadays nobody plays for very high stakes, there's no glamor of adventurous achievement."

"I dont know about that," I demurred. "Remember Connie Cole!"

Aunt Julie dropped her spoon with a clatter.

"Heavens, child!" she exclaimed, "how did you ever hear of such a person?"

"Connie Cole," repeated Monsieur Pelissier, reflectively. "I do not remember that name. Who was she?"

"An adventuress, a swindler on a gigantic scale," I returned. "The papers were full of it at the time of her arrest and conviction, but perhaps you were not in this country then. It was all of six years ago, but Daddy told me something of her. She must have been a wonderful woman, with a remarkably shrewd brain, and a magnetic personality. Daddy said she could talk you into anything. She managed to rob him of quite a sum, twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars, I believe, and he isn't easily fooled. She swindled old established, conservative banks and trust companies all over the country out of perfectly colossal sums of money."

"She commands my admiration!" Monsieur Pelissier smiled cynically. "But she was caught at last, was she not? You spoke of her conviction."

"Yes. A great part of the money she had accu-

mulated was recovered, and I fancy her lawyers got most of the rest. She had a standing army of them, Daddy said, the most noted in the country, but they couldn't save her. She was sentenced to prison for a long term, but Daddy told me she was liberated about two years ago, and that she went abroad.

"I wonder what has become of her," remarked Monsieur Pelissier. "She would be a profoundly interesting person to know."

"Heavens, don't let's talk about such dreadful people," Aunt Julie cried. "It fairly gives me the creeps. In my day, young girls discussed beaux and bonnets; but now it's crime and sociology! It doesn't seem possible that such people as the Cole woman can exist in the world, does it?"

"No," I replied, for she seemed to address me. "It is so lovely and calm and peaceful here, it doesn't seem as if anything could happen anywhere to disturb its serenity."

"But there was a serpent, you know, even in the Garden of Eden," Monsieur Pelissier remarked.

"Thank Heaven there was!" ejaculated Lorna, rising. "It must have been deadly dull before Eve experimented with the apple!"

"Lorna Bailey Smith, I'm ashamed of you!" Aunt Julie cried in consternation. "I'm sure I don't know what you are coming to! Young girls didn't say such things in my generation!"

"No, mother, I've no doubt they thought them instead, and simpered!" retorted Lorna, pertly. Then she turned to me. "Come and take a little stroll before the sun goes down, and it is time to dress for dinner, Maida. I want to show you my favorite nook, near the house. I love the great, bare pile of rocks where the old lighthouse stands, but that is too long a walk now."

She slipped her arm through mine in a girl-like, impulsive way, and drew me down the winding path between the trees. It was quite dark in the depths of the woods, where the beams of the westering sun could not penetrate, and spicy, herby odors assailed us, but the air was chilly and a little damp. It was lovely, although it made me think, somehow, of a graveyard, and I shivered.

Lorna paused, now and again, and looked about her as if she had almost forgotten the way, but at last we came quite suddenly to where a tiny spring bubbled up out of the moss, and a rude seat had been made of flat stones.

"Here!" she exclaimed. "This is my summer den. Here I sit and write my letters, and read, and dream by the hour together, without fear of being disturbed. You like it, Maida?"

"It's lovely," I said, a little doubtfully. "But don't you find it rather dark and lonely sometimes?"

"I like to be alone," she replied. "I think I should go mad if I couldn't get away off by myself sometimes. It's like what church means to some people, I guess. I wrestle with my problems, and struggle with my moods, and think, and plan, and dream, and come away stronger and refreshed. I fancy that is what prayer means."

"I don't know," I hesitated. Lorna, in her introspections, delved sometimes a little deeper beneath the surface of things than I was able to follow. "We were told at school, but I've forgotten who said it—that all inspiration is prayer, but it seems to me that prayer means asking for help from someone stronger and wiser than you are."

"There is no one stronger than you are, if only you will believe it, and rely upon your own strength. No one will ever really help you in this world but yourself, as you'll find, little Maida!" There was the same odd, vehement intensity in her voice that I had noticed before that afternoon, as if she were arguing against herself, fighting something out in her thoughts, and it gave me a queer little puzzled thrill to hear her.

"I should not like to think that!" I said. "It's a kind of cheerless, hopeless philosophy, isn't it, if you happen to feel insignificant, and helpless, and untried? You're not so much older than I,

you know, Lorna—only three years, after all!" She smiled.

"I am centuries older than you, little friend, ages older! I live more in a day than you have in all your life!"

"That's what Bijou said this morning!" I cried resentfully. "She said I didn't know I was alive, just because I haven't been allowed to go about as she evidently has!"

I couldn't help that little thrust, mean and petty as it was. Bijou's lazy contempt still rankled.

"Oh, Bijou!" Loran shrugged disgustedly. "Life will always be to her a marble lined, velvet cushioned *sty*!—Shall we go back? It is getting late, I'm afraid."

It was. The pale sunlight which filtered slantingly through the dense foliage had faded perceptibly, and a dull, angry red glowed in the western sky.

We made our way in silence through the leafy gloom of the woodland trail to the house. Once, I heard, faint and faraway the silvery, measured tolling of a church bell.

"That's funny, isn't it?" I remarked.

"What is"? Lorna looked back at me.

"There, don't you hear it? Church bells, on the mainland, somewhere. It's just vesper time, too. Isn't it queer, on Saturday! It must be a funeral."



"Or Seventh-day Adventists!" laughed Lorna. "Come along, or mother will think we are lost."

When I descended, at dinner-time, only Bijou and Monsieur Pelissier were in the drawing-room, where a wood fire had been lighted on the great square hearth. Although it was really summer, the evening air was autumnal in its sharpness, and there was that settled chill about, as of a house long untenanted.

The dining-room was charming, wide and almost square, with long French windows opening on the veranda, and a low, beamed ceiling. The soft light of many clustered candles in their silver sconces glowed on the graceful, curving lines of the Chippendale sideboard, and gleamed on the faultlessly arranged glass and silver upon the round table. The housekeeper, Mrs. Macpherson, must have been a person of discriminating taste.

Everyone seemed to be a little distrait, and dispirited, except the indefatigable Frenchman, and he kept up a steady flow of merry nonsense until Alaric fairly guffawed at his sallies.

After dinner we sat about the log-fire in the drawing-room, and all at once Lorna seemed to come to life. Her eyes were misty dark and glowing, and the light in them leapt to meet the blazing flames. She urged Monsieur Pelissier to play until he was tired, and then took his place at the

piano, and dashed from czardas to mazurka, from lilting waltz to the crashing, thundering, sonorous chords of a dead march.

I was amazed at this swift, erratic change, no less than by the depth of sensibility and passion which she revealed. She played with a verve and brilliancy which equalled Monsieur Pelissier's, but with more vibrant feeling, more soul.

At dinner she had eaten scarcely anything, and maintained a stony, immobile aloofness. Now she was all sentiment, fire, her emotions rippling just beneath the surface, like the velvety muscles of an athlete.

She finished her performance with a risqué irresistibly captivating little French chansonette, which she sang in a purring, slurring contralto which fascinated one, and then swirled about on the piano stool with the rebellious *moué* of a mischievous child who anticipates a rebuke.

Aunt Julie did not disappoint her, but beneath her shocked reproof I could feel the lurking elation of a respectable barnyard hen who had hatched out a duckling by mistake, and was secretly proud of its eccentricity.

Sunset Island was lovely, but I felt vaguely uncomfortable and nervous. I was very glad that Daddy would soon come.

How long I slept I don't know, but I awakened

suddenly, to find myself sitting bolt upright in bed 'in the darkness, with every nerve in my body tingling. I didn't know what had aroused me for the house was as still as a tomb. The wind had risen and the branches of the trees outside my window were thrashing and souging about with a whistling sound which was inexpressibly dreary, and there was the faint mutter and rumble of distant thunder, which heralded a coming storm.

I was positive that it was a sharper sound which had aroused me so swiftly, and as I listened it came again, borne unmistakably on the wind—a horrible, choking cry. I sprang from the bed, and rushing to the window, flung it wide. The wind whipped the hair about my face, and in the swirling darkness I could see nothing. I crouched there, shivering and straining my eyes to see into the night, but no further sound save the rising storm broke upon my ears.

A spatter of wind-driven rain drove me from the window, and I went back to bed, wondering what that strange cry could have meant. I knew that I hadn't imagined it, but the reassuring thought came to me that perhaps it had been the voice of one of the yacht's crew. The *Tortoise* was not to start upon its return journey until the following morning. Possibly the wind had raised some havoc, and the sailors had been calling to one another.

I am not in the least afraid of a thunder storm, but the electricity in the air increased the state of nerves I was in, and I lay a long time imagining all sorts of awful things. The wind died down finally, however, and the driving rain diminished to a soothing patter, and I was just drifting off into a dreamless unconsciousness, when a new sound came to my ears.

It was a soft, but heavy thud, somewhere below in the house, like the stealthy closing of a door. I raised myself on one elbow. Was someone coming softly up the stairs? I listened, holding my breath. The footsteps grew unmistakably distinct, mounted to the landing, and came nearer and nearer my door. There were two different steps, one very soft but firm and light, like a cat's tread, and the other heavier and dragging. They reached my door, and I could have screamed in sheer nervous terror, but they passed on without a pause. Only, I heard the sudden creak of the bannister railing as someone clutched or collapsed against it, and then through the silent house came the echo of a long, shuddering groan.

## CHAPTER V.

### *The Stranger.*

**T**HE sun was not an hour high when I awoke, and slipping from my bed, I ran to the side window before which I had knelt not so very many hours before. I opened it wide again, and looked straight out into the woodland. A gentle breeze was blowing sibilantly through the pines, and its dew-laden, spicy breath stirred my hair, bearing with it just enough of the salt tang of the sea to make my cheeks tingle, and drive the lingering mist of sleep from my eyes.

In the broad, serene light of day, my nervous terrors of the stormy hours of darkness seemed childish, and I began to believe, after all, that that cry as well as the footsteps outside my door had been nothing but figments of my overwrought imagination. I made up my mind to say nothing about it to the others.

Hundreds of birds were twittering and calling

in the trees, and far away I heard the dull boom and swirl of the surf on the lighthouse rocks. A huge old oak grew close beside my window, its stout, gnarled branches fairly sweeping the sill, and almost in reach of my hand was a robin's nest, with the mother bird sitting quietly on it, watching me critically with her bright, inquiring little eyes. She wasn't at all afraid, but had rather the pleased, excited air of a gossipy neighbor over a new arrival in the community, hesitating only over the propriety of making my acquaintance at once.

"Good morning!" I said softly. "Good morning, little neighbor lady! I'm sure we shall be good friends!"

I turned from the window, and bathed and dressed quickly. None of the rest would be up for hours yet, of course, but wild horses could have not kept me in doors. Everything called to me—the piney, salt breeze, the murmuring trees, the birds, the beckoning fingers of the sun, the echoing surge and cannonade of the waves upon the rocky shore. I felt lighthearted and happy and refreshed and young with the day, and I wanted to be out in it all!

I crept from my room, and went softly around the gallery, and down the wide shallow stairs. The great front doors were bolted fast, and I could not move them, but I heard someone stirring about

in the dining-room, and turned my steps there.

A pretty, rosy-cheeked Irish girl was dusting the sideboard and the room was flooded with sunlight from the opened French windows.

"Good morning!" I said, with a smile.

She jumped at the sound of my voice, and her eyes widened with surprise, at seeing me about so early, I suppose.

"Good m-morning, Miss!" she stammered awkwardly. "'Tis a lovely morning. You're up early, Miss."

"Yes, I'm going for a walk," I replied.

I stepped over the low sill of one of the windows, out upon the veranda, and stood for a moment inhaling the fresh, invigorating air in long, slow breaths which made the blood tingle in my cheeks. Ah, it was good, good to be alive on such a morning!

As I went down the path between the trees, I turned and glanced back. The housemaid stood in the window staring after me stupidly. When she became conscious of my eyes upon her, she gave a final flip of her dust-cloth at the window-casing, and disappeared.

I chose a path which skirted the house, and started off in the opposite direction from the cove where we had landed. It led me quite to the other end of the island where the old lighthouse stood,

and I came upon it suddenly, as I emerged from the woods at a sharp turn in the path. The low scrub of blueberry bushes and sassafras ended in a patch of uphill, sandy, stony ground, from which the rocks of the lighthouse promontory rose sheer and sharply distinct against the deep blue line of the sky, with now and then a dash of feathery spray thrown up from behind it, like a fluttering veil.

The lighthouse itself appeared pathetically aged and forlorn in the pitiless glare of the sun, but there was nothing senile in its stately pride and air of vigilant dominance over its bleak, forgotten realms. It impressed me with a far greater solemnity than any of the ostentatiously benign ruins of cathedrals abroad had done, as it stood faithful even in decay, to the trust of long ago.

I should have liked to explore it then, but the rocks looked slippery and forbidding, and I did not know what pitfalls of rotten planking and broken, falling stairs might await me within, so I decided to defer the venture until Lorna or some of the others could come, too. I didn't like the idea of possible imprisonment there, with a sprained ankle, while the rest searched the island for me, and Aunt Julie worried herself sick. Besides, the hour might be further advanced than I had realized in my ramble through the wood, and I would **not have liked** to be tardy at breakfast.



I followed a different path on my return, a path which appeared to lead along the shoreward side of the island. The trees and undergrowth there were more densely grown, protected as they were from the stinging buffeting winds of the open sea, and the sturdy pines and oaks were interspersed with gracious, spreading maples, feathery in their tender, new green. The air was so clear that the shore of the mainland seemed startlingly near, and quite hilly, and, in a little shadowed cove, I saw the clustered roofs of a village.

Once a trailing spray of sweetbriar clutched my skirt, and as I raised my eyes after stooping to disengage it, I saw just before me the tall, slender chimney of a house rising above the trees. I was surprised, for I had not thought myself so near Hard-a-lee, and I was sure Aunt Julie or one of the girls had told me that no one else lived on the island.

Curiosity hastened my steps, and I came upon a cleaned space, close to a little, shelving beach, and found myself facing a long, low, green-roofed bungalow. It was much smaller than Hard-a-lee, but modern and very pretty, with spacious verandas and sleeping porches above, and a dainty, trellised pergola at the side. A little dock jutted out from the shore and a trim white launch was tied to it, but the terraced lawn was neglected and over-

grown, and the house, with its shuttered windows and cold chimneys wore the detached, somnolent air of having been long vacant. It looked cheerful and summery and restful, however, and I paused to gaze at it for a while before I went on into the woods.

I turned away at last, and had gone but a short distance along a new path which led back toward the center of the island when I heard a merry carolling whistle. I stopped and peered out between the trees in the direction from which it had come, and there upon the beach stood a tall young man, a perfectly strange young man, hatless and bronzed, with the sun glowing on his warm brown hair. He was throwing sticks into the water for a ridiculous, squatty, bow-legged bull dog to retrieve, and he bent his body and swung his arm out with the lithe grace of an athlete. I watched him, fascinated, when the dog, dripping and panting and twitching its blunt screw tail, came to him at last and he rolled it over and over in the hot sand, laughing aloud at its growls of affected protestation. His laugh was clear and hearty and rollicking, with no trace of self-consciousness, as if he were accustomed to be quite by himself in the big open, and wasn't afraid of being heard.

He didn't know I was there, of course, but all at once he turned with the dog at his heels, and

strode into the woods directly towards me. I felt a silly, perfectly unaccountable panic lest he discover me peeping at him, and I ran on quickly up the path, never stopping until I came in sight of the kitchen gardens of Hard-a-lee.

When I rounded the corner of the veranda, they were all assembled there, and Lorna called out gayly:

"Well, you are an early bird, Maida! We thought you were still fast asleep."

"Goodness gracious, child!" exclaimed Aunt Julie, coming forward to kiss me. "Where on earth have you been? When did you get up?"

"About an hour ago," I replied to her last question first. "I awoke early, and the morning was so lovely that I simply could not stay indoors. I walked quite to the other end of the island, to the lighthouse. Everything looks fresh and green after the storm last night."

Monsieur Pelissier arrested his morning greeting to ask, with raised eyebrows:

"Ah, the storm? You are a light sleeper, then, are you not? Mlle. Bijou will not believe me that there was a storm. She insists that it was all our imaginations."

"Oh, no indeed, I watched it from my window," I returned. "The lightning was wonderful!"

"Merciful heavens, aren't you afraid of it?" Aunt

Julie shuddered. "I'm glad I didn't hear it, or I should have been as nervous as a cat. Shall we go to breakfast?"

An impulse came to me to speak of the cry I had fancied I heard just before the storm broke, but it seemed so incredibly silly now, that I put it finally out of my thoughts.

During breakfast, however, I turned to Aunt Julie.

"Does someone else live on Sunset Island?" I asked. "I passed such a pretty bungalow, on my way back from the lighthouse."

"No one lives there," Aunt Julie paused to chip an egg before she continued. "At least no one since we purchased Hard-a-lee. I tried to buy them out so that I might own the whole island, but their agent says they won't sell. They're living abroad, I believe. Their name is Barton, or Barlow——"

"Barford!" Alaric interrupted. "The annointed Boston Barfords. I wish they would come back. There's a young fellow in the family, a son, who seems to be something of a cut-up, from the newspapers. His activities provide good grist when the mills of the yellow journals grind too slowly. He'd be good fun."

"Heavens, I'm glad they're not here!" ejaculated Aunt Julie. "I have trouble enough with you as

it is! I can't think why they won't sell. The place has been shut up for so long."

"It doesn't look it," I remarked. "It seems to be in perfect repair."

"Oh, it was all done over last year. I guess they meant to come home, and then changed their minds." Alaric looked at me quizzically. "Made quite a tour of inspection didn't you, Maida? What do you think of the island?"

"It's charming," I said, but my tone was a little dry, I'm afraid. Without knowing why, I resented his tone. I wasn't prying into other people's affairs. Why shouldn't I have looked at the empty bungalow, if I felt like it? I was glad I hadn't mentioned seeing the strange young man, or Alaric would have teased me about it, too.

I watched him curiously. His appearance belied his bantering tone. He was chalky and hollow-eyed, and although he drank several cups of strong coffee he ate scarcely anything, and later, on the veranda, his hand trembled when he lit a cigarette. I wondered if he could possibly be dissipated; perhaps he had been drinking late the night before with Monsieur Pelissier. But the Frenchman was as debonairly master of himself as ever.

"I'm going to write some letters," Aunt Julie announced after breakfast. "Sunday always seems to me the best letter writing day of the week.

Alaric will go to the mainland tomorrow morning in the launch for the mail. If you have any letters to send, Maida, just leave them on the table in the hall tonight."

"Thank you, Aunt Julie," I replied. "I don't think I shall write any today, but I'm looking forward to a letter from Daddy. He will surely let me know tomorrow what time he will arrive on Wednesday."

"Oh, yes, of course." Something in her tone made me glance quickly at Aunt Julie. Her good-natured, disingenuous face wore a peculiar, uncomfortable expression, and there was a pause which none of the rest attempted to break.

"My trunks should arrive soon," I finally suggested. "I will appreciate it if you will look after them."

"Certainly," Alaric replied.

Lorna slipped her arm through mine.

"Come!" she said. "I'm going to show you over the house. I know you'll love that quaint old wing I told you about, the part that was built of the cabins of the old wreck."

There were four huge rooms in a square on the first floor; the drawing-room and dining-room on the right of the entrance hall, the library and billiard room on the left. It was the latter that the wing adjoined, which Lorna spoke of, and it was

charmingly quaint and interesting. The floor was evidently that of an old deck, the walls and ceilings heavily beamed and ribbed, with port holes for windows and ship's lanterns for light, containing cunningly concealed electric light bulbs. It had been arranged as a smoking-room and lounge, and instead of chairs there were bunks built in around the walls and a rude, heavy, scarred old table was clamped to the floor in the center. It was a curious, incongruous addition to the rest of the house, but thoroughly consistent in itself, and I wondered how Aunt Julie had managed to refrain from spoiling it with fluffy curtains at the ports, and rugs and bric-a-brac monstrosities.

Alaric seemed to have gotten over his nervous mood by lunch time, and in the afternoon I played him three sets of tennis. He drove a hard, fast game, and although I won the first set four to two, I remember, he took the victory from me easily in the rest.

Warm and a little tired, but glowing from the exercise, I was on my way to my room, to rest and change before dinner, when I encountered the housemaid in the hall, the same young Irish girl who had stared at me so curiously that morning. She jumped again when I came suddenly upon her just outside my door, and hurried off as fast as she could go, looking back over her shoulder with

round eyes. She seemed to be very inexperienced and badly trained for her position in such a well-managed household as this. Her uncouth manner annoyed me as much as the veiled insolence of Aunt Julie's maid, Lucie.

Oh, I would be glad when Daddy came! At the thought of him, a memory flashed across my mind of Aunt Julie's peculiar, uncomfortable manner that morning when I had spoken of his coming. Could she have divined that I meant to ask him to take me away with him?

The next morning, Alaric went to the mainland, not in the launch, but in his own racing motor-boat, and brought back the mail.

My trunks had not arrived—but Aunt Julie assured me that express matter was often late.

There was a letter for me from Daddy, though, and I seized it eagerly and tore it open. As I glanced down the usual blunt, typewritten page to his dear, familiar signature at the bottom, my heart sank, and for a moment I could not trust myself to speak because of the tears which choked me. He wasn't coming, after all! He was going to sail on Wednesday, instead of Saturday, without seeing me.

"Oh, isn't it a shame, Maida!" Aunt Julie looked up from a letter which she too, had received from Daddy. "Your father won't be able to come to us!



He says that urgent business on the other side necessitates his sailing by the first steamer Wednesday. It is a great disappointment for all of us, of course, we had so looked forward to having him with us here at Hard-a-lee, but you must not let it grieve you too much, child. He tells me that he will visit us on his return, and it will be only a few weeks before you will see him again, at the most."

I looked straight into her eyes.

"Aunt Julie, you knew that Daddy wasn't coming," I said, deliberately. "Why didn't you tell me?"

My heart-breaking disappointment made me savage, and although I blushed for my rudeness afterward, I would not have checked it then if I could, for I felt that I had been very unfairly treated.

"My dear child," Aunt Julie came to me and put her arms about me, impulsively. "I'll tell you the truth. I really didn't think, from what he told me when I last saw him, that he would be able to come, but while there was the slightest chance that he could manage to spare the time, I could not bear to have you disappointed, perhaps unnecessarily. This financial matter is of vital importance to him, or he would certainly have deferred it, if he possibly could, to have seen you once more before sailing. If I had told you of

my doubts, and then he had been able to come after all, you would have grieved for nothing. You cannot blame me for not wanting to spoil the pleasure of your first few days here."

I drew myself quietly from her arms.

"Please forgive me, Aunt Julie," I said slowly. "I am sorry I spoke so hastily. Daddy is all that I have in the world, you know, and I—I am bitterly disappointed. If you will excuse me now, I will go to my room."

Blinded with the tears I could not control any longer, I stumbled up the stairs, and threw myself on the couch. Daddy! Daddy! I wanted him so! Perhaps Aunt Julie had been right after all, when she said he knew that money was the only thing which counted in the world! Perhaps he didn't love me. I might be only a nuisance and a care to him, a burden which he was glad to shift to other people's shoulders. It must be that all he thought of, all that he lived for, was this sordid money game!

Then a quick revulsion of feeling came to me and I was bitterly ashamed of myself for such a disloyal thought. Of course Daddy loved me, better than anything in all this world! I was too young and inexperienced to be able to understand his colossal financial affairs, but I knew that a great many other people depended on him, and he was

morally responsible for the safety of their fortunes, and could not think only of himself and his own inclinations. Common sense told me, too, that no possible question of my comfort and well-being could have entered his mind. On the contrary, he must have felt more contented and at peace about me than at any other time since mother died, knowing that I was with old and dear friends. I could not help wishing, however, that he hadn't so easily taken it for granted that I would be happy with them. Daddy, like most dominant men, never considered the possibility of a point of view other than his own until it was forcibly presented to him.

How could I go through the long weeks and months of the interminable summer which stretched out before me, with such uncongenial, shallow, desperately common people! Oh, why hadn't Daddy come!

I became aware at last of a light insistent knocking at the door, and I sat up wiping my eyes and called: "Come in."

The knob turned, but the door did not open, and suddenly remembering that I had locked it, I went quickly and turned the key.

Lorna stood on the threshold, and at the sight of her wistful face, alive with sympathy, my heart opened to her. After all, she wasn't like the rest, and even they hadn't meant to be unkind.

"My poor Maida!" she said. "I didn't mean to intrude upon you, but I couldn't bear to think of you up here all alone on this lovely day, crying your eyes out over something that cannot be helped. But you mustn't feel as you said down stairs, that he is all you have in the world. You're not alone, Maida dear. Of course we are no relation, but we are such old friends that it is almost as if we were of the same family."

"I know, and I'm afraid I seemed dreadfully rude, but I had looked forward so to seeing Daddy that I was heartsick," I replied. "It was silly of me to cry, but I couldn't help it."

"Of course you couldn't!" Lorna put her arm about my waist, and drew me to the window. "But you are not going to cry any more, are you? The days will soon pass, and we will have lots of happy times together. For you will be happy with us, Maida. I am sure that when you see your father again you will be able to tell him that."

"Oh, yes," I said, smiling faintly, and trying to speak with an assurance which somehow I did not feel.

"Well, bathe your eyes now and we'll go down to the others, shall we? Mother is worrying for fear you still feel hurt toward her."

"I don't, truly I don't," I replied as earnestly as I could. "We will go down at once, of course."

At the door a few minutes later, she paused and with a hand upon each of my shoulders she said, almost abruptly:

"I like you, you dear, funny, little thing! I mean that you shall not be unhappy! I should feel wretched, guilty,—about not telling you that your father would not come, of course—if you were. You will try, then, to forget this disappointment and be happy once more?"

There was something in her repressed manner which I could not at all understand. As I gave her my assurance, I felt more than ever that she was a very strange sort of a girl, indeed.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *Robinson Crusoe*

O H, by the way," Aunt Julie remarked at lunch. "Who do you think is coming to see us, Maida? You must have heard of him through your father. It's Mr. Hilton.

"Of course I have!" I exclaimed. "Fordyce and Hilton have been Daddy's brokers for years, in New York. I didn't know you knew them, Aunt Julie."

"They have been my brokers, too, on your father's advice, for a long time," she replied. "I've given them full charge of all my affairs, and I trust them as implicitly as I would your father. A letter came from Mr. Hilton in this morning's mail."

"When will he be here?" I asked.

"Tomorrow morning. It is just a flying visit, you know, on a matter of business. I don't believe he will be able to stay longer than just over night."

"He's such a nice old gentleman!" Bijou remarked. "I'm sure you'll like him, Maida."

"I don't think he's so old!" I protested. "He can't be anywhere near fifty, yet. Daddy says he is one of the youngest men to have attained such prominence in the Street."

"What!" cried Lorna. "You—you know him, Maida?"

"Of course," I replied, surprised at her tone. "Daddy has taken me out to dinner with him several times. I believe his partner, Mr. Fordyce, is older. I've never seen him."

"Just fancy your being friends! Isn't that lovely, mother?" It struck me oddly that Lorna's tone wasn't as enthusiastic as her words. She did not glance at Aunt Julie but drank the last of her coffee before she went on. "Mother has transacted more of her business with Mr. Fordyce than with the junior partner. That is why she didn't understand his sending Mr. Hilton instead of coming himself, but I suppose he is too busy."

"I wish your father were here to advise me," remarked Aunt Julie, plaintively. "Of course I trust Hilton and Fordyce, but ever since Daniel died, I've consulted your father, about every big financial move I've made, and I have grown to rely on him."

"Well, if you're not sure about it, mater, keep out of it," advised Alaric, "at least until Mr. Waring gets back from Europe. Women have no business monkeying around Wall Street, anyway! Sooner or later

they're bound to take things into their own hands, make a fool move, and get swamped."

"Did you ever know me to make a fool move, as you call it?" demanded Aunt Julie in a peculiarly dry, significant tone.

Alaric looked at her, and a slow smile broke over his heavy face.

"Yes, once," he chuckled. "Wasn't there a man named Bridgewater——"

"Alaric!" his mother cried, rising swiftly from her chair. She was trembling violently and her eyes were like points of steel.

"Oh, all right, mater!" Alaric returned easily. "You needn't get ruffled. You asked me, you know!"

Still chuckling, he pushed back his chair and sauntered out to the veranda, and Aunt Julie seated herself again.

"Insolent!" she muttered, half under her breath. Her hand shook as she put down her cup and she was quite pale from anger. I couldn't help wondering what Alaric had referred to; the name "Bridgewater" had a familiar ring somehow.

"I think you said you'd never met Mr. Fordyce, Maida?" Lorna asked turning to me after a rather uncomfortable pause.

"No," I answered. "I suppose I shall meet him next winter, when Daddy and I have an establishment of our own in New York."



"I wish Mr. Fordyce could have come instead of Mr. Hilton," Lorna's tone was troubled, and her mother's sharply indrawn breath, like a sigh, seemed to echo it.

That afternoon I slipped away by myself and went for a walk. Monsieur Pelissier annoyed me, and the rest seemed so much occupied with their own affairs that I felt as if my presence were an intrusion. The atmosphere of the whole house seemed surcharged with anxiety and suspense, and the tension made me feel horribly ill at ease, although I didn't in the least know why.

Quite unconsciously, I took the path leading to the Barford's bungalow. I had strolled some little distance from Hard-a-lee when I realized the direction in which I was going, and as it really made no difference to me which way I went, I kept on. There wasn't the slightest probability that I should encounter that strange young man whom I had seen the day before. He had doubtless only run out from the mainland for an hour, in that launch that I had observed tied up at the Barford's dock. He had looked rather attractive, now that I thought of him again; very much nicer than Alaric or Monsieur Pelissier. I wondered if he were a member of the summer colony nearby.

I found myself wishing that the Barford bungalow was occupied. It gave me a queer, isolated feeling to be all alone on this remote island, with just the Smith household, and my heart sank again at the thought of

the long weeks ahead. Mr. Hilton's coming would be somewhat of a comfort, at any rate.

Soon I saw the chimneys of the house rising among the trees, and I paused suddenly. A blue, feathery spiral of smoke was curling up from one of them, and at the same moment I heard the sharp, excited barking of a dog.

I wouldn't go back, it would look as if I were running away, and there was no earthly reason why I should. However, I didn't need to walk straight up to the house. I turned to the right, and made my way through the trees toward the beach. That young man whom I had seen must have been a Barford. Then, we were to have neighbors after all.

I emerged from the trees and walked leisurely along the sand, but the barking seemed to come nearer, so I seated myself on a rock half screened by a clump of sumac bushes, and waited. The young man, if he passed that way, would not observe me, and I wanted to see that dear, funny little dog again; besides I happened to have on my prettiest embroidered linen frock, and a floppy garden hat with pink roses, which wasn't at all unbecoming.

The little dog appeared, racing along the beach, and when he was almost opposite me, he stopped, sniffing, and began to dig wildly, throwing up the loose sand in a shower behind him.

"That's it! Go on, get him, old fellow!" I heard a

voice say, startlingly near. "There he is! Get him!"

The young man came sauntering into view and stood laughing that rich, hearty laugh which I had heard the day before, as the dog with a great show of triumph, unearthed a huge, horrid, sprawling land crab, which snapped viciously at him, and scuttled straight toward where I was sitting.

"You don't want him. Come along, Friday!"

And then I did a dreadful thing; I laughed! I couldn't help it, it just bubbled out. The little dog was such a ridiculous Man Friday, and the young man was far from the gaunt, tattered Robinson Crusoe of my picture books.

He was looking straight at me. I could feel it, although my eyes were on that crab, which was fast approaching. The little dog saw me, too, and bounded forward,—wagging his absurd stump of a tail in the friendliest way.

"Come here, sir!" the young man ordered, adding as he drew nearer, "I beg your pardon. I hope the dog hasn't hurt your gown jumping up on it like that. He's no respecter of persons."

"Not in the least," I assured him with dignity, and then I spoiled it all by an irrepressible squeal. "Oh-h, will you please take that crab away?"

He picked the creature up hastily by one of its back legs and threw it far out on the sands.

"Thank you," I murmured, and then, because I didn't

know what to do next I bent down and patted the little dog, who instantly rolled over on his back at my feet, waving his ridiculous short curved legs in the air.

"Be careful, he's all wet!" the young man admonished. "He's in and out of the water all day. He loves it."

"Yes. I saw you throwing sticks for him yesterday morning." I could have bitten my tongue out the next minute, but it was too late to recall the admission, and I could feel myself blushing, which was infinitely worse.

"You seemed to be in rather a hurry yesterday," he remarked with a smile. "I hope we didn't startle you by our sudden appearance on your island, Miss Smith."

That was the second time in four days. First that queerly acting sailor on the *Tortoise* had thought me a member of the family, and now this young man had made the same mistake. It was a natural enough assumption, of course, and it was on the tip of my tongue to enlighten him, but I thought better of it.

"Then you knew that you were not in sole possession,—Robinson Crusoe?" I asked.

He laughed again.

"Of course. I saw your yacht when you arrived. Isn't it rather lonely for you up here, in spite of your large family? It's awfully quiet and cut off from the world."

This must be the son of the Barford's, I decided; the

lively young man who, according to Alaric, had been in the newspapers so much.

"We don't mind that," I parried. "But it must be stupid for you—that is, if you are by yourself."

"Oh, no, I have Laddie, you see," he looked down at the dog, as he spoke.

"I thought you called him Friday," I returned.

"For the moment," he smiled. "But Laddie is the name he answers to; don't you, old man?"

The dog jumped up on hearing himself mentioned, and eagerly claimed his master's attention.

"I was likening myself to our old friend Crusoe, when you came upon me," the young man continued, "although I'm not a castaway here, I assure you. I came quite of my own volition, to finish some work on which I'm engaged."

"Oh," I remarked, a little blankly. That didn't sound very much like young Mr. Barford, from Alaric's description of him. "But you don't work all the time, do you?"

"No. Laddie and I go in swimming, and roam around generally all over the place. You seem to like trotting off by yourself a great deal too. There isn't very much to do here, anyway, but just loaf, is there?"

"Tennis and bridge," I made a little wry face. "That's all the others care about. But it's lovely here, I suppose one can't help being happy."

I'm afraid my tone was rather wistful, although I

didn't mean it to be. I wouldn't for the world have had this strange young man think anything was wrong, and that I was taking him into my confidence.

"I don't think happiness depends altogether on the place, do you?"

"On what, then?" I asked. He really had very nice eyes. "On yourself?"

I had suddenly remembered what Lorna had said the afternoon of our arrival when we had that little talk in her summer den, about depending wholly on one's self.

"On yourself, and the people about you," he spoke reflectively, as if he were thinking aloud. "We all need companionship, of one sort or another, I suppose. Underneath the substrata of conventions, we're a sociable lot, we humans."

"But when people are not congenial," I ventured, "when they rather grate upon you——"

"Oh, one can be lonely in a crowd, of course. It's only the right people who count——" he broke off and I could feel that he was looking at me rather curiously. After an uncomfortable pause, he asked somewhat irrelevantly. "Had you been to the lighthouse when I saw you yesterday? It's a jolly old place, isn't it?"

"It seemed to be rather gloomy and forbidding, and the rocks looked slippery. I didn't go inside," I replied, incautiously.

"What, haven't you ever been?" he asked in sur-

prise. "I fancied you must have explored it, at least when you were here before. It's quite interesting. Everything is just as the men left it when it was abandoned, but it is all going to rack and ruin now."

"Is it long since it was used in the service? I should like to see it sometime," I remarked.

He seemed about to speak and then checked himself, for some reason.

At that moment Laddie, who had been busily scurrying around in the undergrowth halted at the base of a great oak tree and set up a furious barking.

"Look! he's raised a chipmunk!" exclaimed the young man.

I did look and I saw something besides the chipmunk; it was the sun, and it had sunk surprisingly low in the west.

"Oh, it is late!" I cried aghast. How long could I have been talking there with that perfectly strange young man! "I must go home at once."

"Yes, I suppose you must. I hope I haven't detained you too long. Laddie and I have enjoyed this little break in our solitude."

He held out his hand frankly, and after a moment I laid mine in it. I liked the clear, steady look in his eyes, and his firm, warm hand-clasp.

"Good-bye, Robinson Crusoe," I laughed, and turning with a little wave of my hand, I made my way between the trees to the homeward path.

He stood quite still where I had left him, and I could feel his eyes upon me as long as I was in sight. My heart was beating like a trip-hammer, from my haste, I suppose, and a warm, pleasant little glow of adventure thrilled me. I could not believe that he was wild and horrid, as Alaric had implied; he gave one the impression of steadiness, and strength, and energy of purpose. I would never see him again, of course, unless he called on the Smiths. In meeting and talking with an utter stranger, as I had that afternoon, I felt that I had been unconventional of course, but not actually improper. I realized, however, that it mustn't happen again.

Everyone was dressing for dinner when I reached Hard-a-lee and the veranda was deserted. During the meal, the conversation was all on Mr. Hilton's prospective arrival. I didn't mention my encounter with young Mr. Barford; it wasn't that I felt exactly guilty about it, but as long as the adventure was not to be repeated, I saw no need of referring to it.

We played bridge afterward, Alaric and I against Bijou and her mother and I was genuinely surprised. Alaric had seemed to me to be stupid and shallow, a cheaply glazed imitation of the men about town whom he had met but I saw that in one thing, at least, he was thoroughly master. His card sense was marvellous; he watched the game with the avidity of a born gambler and manoeuvred with the dexterity of a trained



one. So this, then, was his metier! I felt that I could understand some of the items of the enormous expense which Aunt Julie had confessed he had put upon her.

It was still quite early when we finished the rubber, and I slipped out to the veranda for a breath of the sweet, pungent night air before I went to bed. I sank into a low chair, and looked out over the silver-topped trees to the softly gleaming sheen of the sea, upon which Daddy would be sailing in two short days. Sailing without me, in spite of all we had planned, without even a farewell word to me! My eyes filled with tears again as I thought of it. It seemed a year since Daddy's letter had come, and it was only that morning; would the interminable days ever pass?

While I was staring miserably out into the night, I heard a soft footfall behind me, and a low voice, nearer than I liked, remarked:

"Ah, so Miss Waring stole away from us all! That was unkind!"

"Indeed no, Monsieur Pelissier," I replied, a trifle shortly. "You were not in the drawing-room when the game broke up."

"You looked for me?" his tone was distinctly ironical. "I am honored."

I bit my lip in vexation, and was silent since the only retort which I could think of at the moment would have been unthinkably rude. After a little, he went on, in totally unnecessary explanation:

"I strolled out here to—how do you say?—to commune with myself, in the beauty of the night. It is perfect, is it not?"

"Yes," I assented hastily. "It is lovely out here."

"Ah, the moonlight!" his voice was dreamy, and caressingly soft. "Moonlight and summer seas and whispering trees, and solitude. Charming, but such a pitiful waste, is it not?"

"A waste?" I repeated.

"Of opportunity." He was so close to me that his breath stirred my hair. "A beautiful setting, without the jewel; every attribute for happiness, save its little god himself! A lover's paradise—and no love. Is it not sad?"

"I think it is quite perfect without any meddlesome, impudent little god!" I laughed, with an ease which I was far from feeling. If this odious creature tried to flirt with me, it would cap the climax of my distaste for the whole situation in which I found myself.

"Ah, it is because you do not know him that you speak so slightly of him!" Monsieur Pelissier protested whimsically. "Do not scoff at him, Mademoiselle. To some he never comes, though the door is set wide for him by day, and the light burns each night in the window: and to some he comes though bolts are drawn and bars are raised against him. And always he rules when he makes his presence known."

"That is very pretty," I said disdainfully. "I have—

n't thought very much about it. There are so many other things——"

"That is the fault, the one blemish upon the charming demoiselles of your wonderful country." His tone was meditatively impersonal, and I breathed more freely. "With us, our young girls think of him, dream of him, await his coming with eager impatience, but you Americans—you invent for yourselves other interests, other excuses for your existence. Your lives are too full of borrowed things, you shut the doors of your busy homes in the face of the little god who pauses on your threshold."

"I think we have quite as much romance in our make-up as the girls of any other country," I returned.

"No. Our girls look upon every man as the probable lover, you regard him simply as a big brother. That, Mademoiselle, is the difference."

"Not always, Monsieur." I gave that time to sink in before I added. "By probable lover you mean possible husband, do you not? I have had no experience, but I think love means to us a companion, a sharer in all happiness and sorrow the future may hold. But to your demure, confiding ingenues he comes with one hand on his heart and in the other a pair of scales to weight their *dot*."

He drew in his breath sharply, with a little sibilant note of quick resentment, but I turned my head away

and smiled into the darkness. I knew that I had been disgracefully rude and I was glad of it. I forgot the ordinary obligation of courtesy toward a fellow guest of my mother's old friend; I only knew I wanted him to detest me as thoroughly as I did him, and keep as far away from me as our common path would permit.

After a moment he laughed pleasantly, without a trace of annoyance, and said in a tone so bland that it almost cloaked the insolence of his words:

"Ah, yes! You have expressed it far better than I, Mademoiselle. Our women give, and yours—sell."

I rose. I wanted to overwhelm him with a crushing retort, but I felt that I was already beyond my depth.

"Sometimes we do neither; we keep," I said as lightly as I could. "Good night, Monsieur. Sunset Island is very beautiful by moonlight, and it may be inviting to the little god with whom you appear to be on such familiar terms, but I'm afraid it holds dangers for the unwary."

"Dangers?" he blocked my way to the door and his voice was suddenly tense, and very low.

"Malaria, to say nothing of other germs," I said distinctly, adding, "Ennui, for instance."

He threw back his head and laughed again, with an amused tolerance which made my blood boil.

"*Touché!*" he exclaimed, as he stepped aside, with a bow. "Mademoiselle will be a formidable adversary,

when her foil is tempered by experience and tipped with discretion! *Bon soir.*"

I turned on my heel and left him precipitately. I could have cried with sheer vexation and disgust. I had never known until that moment what actual hatred was, and it frightened me to be able to loathe anything alive as I loathed Monsieur Pelissier!

## CHAPTER VII.

*Mr. Fordyce.*

THE next morning, when I thought over that little scene, I was terribly ashamed, and disgusted with myself, too. My rudeness had been inexcusable except on the score of my own instinctive dislike of the Frenchman, and that I had displayed in the crudest, most gauche manner imaginable.

Which of the two girls was he really trying to marry? I could not decide. At times I was almost sure that it was Bijou; at others it seemed to me that some tacit understanding already existed between him and Lorna, but it was more her attitude than his which gave me that impression.

I was late to breakfast with all my cogitating. The others had almost finished when I hurried into the dining-room. Alaric drank his coffee and rose just as I entered.

"About time for us to be off, isn't it, Raoul?" he asked. "We don't want to keep Hilton waiting around

in that one-horse village, and his train is due in three quarters of an hour. We'll have to take the launch, of course ; I don't believe he'd trust himself in that racer."

Aunt Julie rose, also.

"I really do think that I'd better go with you," she observed anxiously. "I've got as much at stake as you, and I want to see him at once, at the earliest possible moment——"

She broke off as Alaric turned to her with angry impatience, but to my unbounded astonishment it was her guest, Monsieur Pelissier, who replied to her, and the domineering authority in his tone was unmistakable.

"You will do nothing of the sort!" he asserted. "You will remain here! What do you think he would say to you if you——" he checked himself, his tone snapping like the lash of a whip, then went on after an almost imperceptible pause: "He would be distressed beyond measure if his hostess, avowedly unhappy on the water, should undertake the trip merely to greet him on arrival. Dear lady, can you not leave the first welcome to your son, and to me?"

Aunt Julie turned away with a little shrug.

"Very well," she said. "No doubt it would be foolish of me." She trailed out on the veranda, and Bijou remarked to me:

"Mother is worried about some investments, but it doesn't do to let these brokers think you are too anxious, does it?"

Lorna said nothing, and went on with her breakfast composedly, but I felt that she was watching me curiously, so I drank my coffee in a noncommittal silence. Evidently they were all involved in this financial issue, Monsieur Pelissier as well as the rest, for Aunt Julie's remark: "I've got as much at stake as you," had been a general one. The Frenchman's bullying manner, too, had revealed one point which had been obscure to me, beyond a shadow of a doubt. A definite understanding of some sort existed between him and either Lorna or Bijou, that was plain. He manifestly considered himself one of the family already, and it was not difficult to perceive that he meant to rule them all with no light hand, and perhaps even assume the complete control of their affairs. I felt sorry for them all, for I could imagine poor dazzled, easy-going Aunt Julie gradually relinquishing the reins to such a brilliant, astute son-in-law, and finding later, to her cost, that he was as utterly unscrupulous as I felt him to be.

When breakfast was over, we joined Aunt Julie on the veranda. The sun was shining, but through a murky, yellow haze and not a leaf stirred in the still air. The whole atmosphere seemed heavily surcharged, and even the birds twittered and chirped in a subdued fashion.

We watched the departing launch until it became a mere dot on the glassy, unnaturally smooth expanse of



the water, and then Aunt Julie sank into a chair, and took up her long-suffering embroidery.

"Oh, dear," she sighed. "I'm all thumbs this morning. This visit of Mr. Hilton's upsets me. I never did have a head for business, and I hate being bothered with it."

"Uncle Dan used to say you were as good a manager as a man, Aunt Julie," I remarked.

"He meant economizer," she laughed. "I guess I was, but the Lord knows I've gotten all out of that now. I learned the value of things, but I've long since forgotten to ask the prices. As for stock quotations, they've always been a mystery to me, and it makes my head ache to try to puzzle them out. I leave all that to Fordyce and Hilton."

"Still I should think you would keep watch in the newspapers of those you are interested in," I couldn't help saying. "It must be a very exciting game, if you do any active trading. You must know all the figures you buy them in at, and I can imagine how thrilling it would be to speculate on their going up or down."

"You're your father's daughter!" exclaimed Aunt Julie. "If he doesn't look out you will be taking a flyer yourself, before he knows it! Bijou is more fond of dress, and Lorna of books, than Wall Street and the Bourse and the London Exchange rolled into one. I never think, myself, of looking at the financial page of a newspaper."

"I do hope Alaric brings some back with him from the mainland," I observed, as a sudden thought came to me. "Some newspapers, I mean. Just think, it is Tuesday, and we haven't seen a paper since we left town on Friday! All sorts of things may have happened, and we not know!"

Lorna laughed.

"He probably won't think to bring any," she said. "We'll tell him to order some the next time he goes. We haven't any of us got the newspaper habit, Maida. We're scandalously incurious about what goes on outside of our own little world. I doubt if we look through a paper from one week's end to another."

"They're always full of crime and wars and dreadful things, anyway," Bijou supplemented lazily. "Who wants to read about them?"

"Well, I hope my trunks have come, anyway," I remarked. I could not comprehend such a shallow, self-centered outlook, and it was useless for me to try. I think Lorna divined my bewildered mood, for she broke the pause, and chattered easily and lightly of everyday matters until an hour or more had slipped by, and the time approached for the return of the launch.

We saw it finally, a little black speck dancing over the water, and watched it grow larger and take form until we could dimly discern the three figures seated in the stern.

It disappeared into the cove, which was screened from us by the trees, and we could hear the faint chug-chug of the engine as it slowed down.

Aunt Julie put aside her needlework, a curious, strained expression growing in her good natured, disingenuous face.

"I hope Mr. Hilton brought some chocolates," Bijou remarked flippantly. "We're very nearly out of sweets."

Nobody replied to her, and then all at once Alaric and Monsieur Pelissier appeared on the winding path between the pines, with a third man between them.

"Why!" I exclaimed in surprise. "That's not Mr. Hilton!"

"It's Mr. Fordyce! He's come, himself!" Aunt Julie rose and advanced to the steps. "How do you do? This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Fordyce."

The newcomer bowed over her hand with ceremonious courtesy.

"I am delighted to have been able to avail myself of this opportunity of accepting your long-standing invitation, dear Mrs. Smith," he returned. "I discovered at the last moment that it would be possible for me to come, so I left Robert to attend to the office routine in my stead for a day or two. Miss Smith, I heard of the taxicab accident with great regret. I trust you were not hurt?"

"Oh, no," replied Lorna, giving him her hand. "It

might have been inconvenient, though. I feared I should be held by the police as a witness."

"Ah! There was an arrest made, then? It was as serious as that?"

"I don't know!" she laughed. "I didn't wait to see. I knew mother would be anxious at my delay, as it was, so I jumped into another machine and told the chauffeur to put on all speed. I don't think they even got my number."

I was puzzled. Lorna spoke carefully, as if choosing her words because of some underlying significance. I dismissed the absurd fancy the next minute, however, as Mr. Fordyce smiled in a fatherly way at Bijou, and Aunt Julie drew me forward.

"And this," she said, "is the daughter of our old friend Larry Waring. Maida, my dear, Mr. Fordyce."

I put my hand shyly in his, and listened happily to his courtly, old-fashioned greeting. He was a towering, splendidly built man of nearly sixty, I should judge, but a man in the full prime of life. His square shoulders, his firm well-knit hands, and the keen, kindly eyes beneath the bushy white brows, all bespoke virile strength and a consciousness of his own dominance over others. His manner was utterly unlike his partner's, as I remembered Mr. Hilton. He had none of that brusque, matter-of-fact alertness which I associated in my mind with the usual broker and financier; he impressed me as being more like a college

professor, or lecturer. He spoke with the urbane ease and breadth of an orator, and his voice was rich and rolling and persuasive.

He was Daddy's friend and confidant, and I was so glad to meet him that I could have thrown my arms about his neck and hugged him like a little child, and I think he must have discerned something of my feelings in my face, for he held my hand still in his as he talked.

"It is a great pleasure to me to meet the young lady of whom I have heard so much," he added, after his conventional greeting. "Your father has spoken of you so often to me as the 'Little Princess' who fills his thoughts, and for whom all these marvellous financial operations which Mr. Hilton and I have put through in his name, have been planned. Mr. Waring is a valued friend, as I trust his daughter will also be."

"Thank you, Mr. Fordyce," I managed to reply, as a lump came into my throat, "'Little Princess' was Daddy's own nickname for me, and when I heard it upon strange lips a great wave of loneliness swept over me, and I would have given anything in the world if only he had been standing there before me in place of Mr. Fordyce.

I murmured something further in response, and then he dropped my hand and turned to the other girls. Aunt Julie had been standing on the edge of the steps, talking to Alaric and Monsieur Pelissier, but now she came forward and took Mr. Fordyce into the house.

"Jolly old fossil, isn't he?" commented Alaric, with cheerful disrespect, adding obviously for the girls' benefit: "Mother was silly to get all worked up. He says her affairs are in bully shape, and never promised better.—Come on, Maida, let's have some tennis."

"Alaric, haven't my trunks come?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"No; they must have gone astray somehow. Are you sure they were properly labelled?"

"Absolutely. Miss Farmingdale attended to it herself, and I saw the expressman remove them," I replied. "What can have happened to them?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. I raised a rumpus with the station agent about them, and he's sent out a tracer."

"Oh, some mistake has occurred. They will be here in a few days, undoubtedly," Lorna observed. "In the meantime, Maida, if you need anything, just tell me. You and I are almost of a size, and I have everything you could want——"

"Thanks, Lorna," I said, perfunctorily. "I brought enough things with me in my bags to last for a week or two, if necessary."

Alaric and I played tennis until noon, and then the heat became so intense that we were compelled to stop. There wasn't a sign of a breeze, and the heavy oppression in the atmosphere seemed to increase with the brassy haze settling over the still sea.

"I shouldn't wonder if a perfect fury of a storm

blew up," observed Alaric, as we mounted the steps of the deserted veranda. "It's unusual for the time of year, but this is the way they start on the coast. If it comes, there won't be much chance of Fordyce getting away tomorrow."

"Oh, is he going back so soon?" I asked, regretfully. I had liked him tremendously at that first meeting, and hoped that he would remain, at least for a little while. "I suppose his time is very valuable, though."

"Yes. He said in the launch coming over that he must return as soon as possible. He only came to assure mother personally that everything is all right, she was so worried. I suppose that next to your father her account is the largest on his books."

Aunt Julie appeared to have regained her usual cheerful spirits at lunch, and the meal passed off very pleasantly. However, there still seemed to be a sort of constraint in the air, although it may have emanated purely from my imagination. Mr. Fordyce drew me more and more into the conversation, but I could not help feeling that I was rather in the way, as if the whole family would have liked the opportunity to talk to their new guest without my presence. After lunch I slipped away by myself.

I did not go in the direction of the lighthouse or the bungalow, however, but quite the other way. That strange young man had been very nice, but of course it wouldn't do to encounter him again.

I started up the path leading to the cove where the boathouse was, but after a hundred yards more, I perceived a narrow, winding trail branching off to the right, and decided to follow it. It led finally to the beach on the seaward side of the island, and I emerged from the wood and strolled aimlessly along the sand, watching the surf roll up over the stones.

How far I walked I haven't the least idea, but the sun's glare at length drove me again into the shelter of the trees. There wasn't any pathway, and the woods seemed more dense, and bore less evidence of cultivation than the other parts of the island where I had been. I pushed my way back through a perfect thicket of undergrowth, and came quite suddenly upon a tiny cleared space in a semi-circle of towering oaks. It was dim and cool and restful, and I paused, looking about me. Some landscape gardening had manifestly been started there, I noticed, for almost at my feet a narrow trench had been dug and filled to form a long, straight mound.

Whether it was the stillness and solitude, the brooding storm, the state of my nerves, or all three combined to make me so morbidly fanciful, I could not have told, but it flashed over my mind that that flower bed was exactly the shape of a new-made grave, and a ridiculous sensation of panic seized me. I turned and ran just as hard as I could, not caring where my flying feet carried me, anxious only to put space between



myself and that sinister mound of freshly turned earth.

My thoughts swiftly reverted to that cry which I had fancied I heard during the storm on the night of my arrival. Could one of the sailors on the *Tortoise* have been killed during a brawl, and secretly buried here by the murderers, without the knowledge of the Smiths or anyone? But hadn't I fancied also that I had heard stealthy footsteps passing my door an hour or so after that cry had been borne to me on the rising wind?

I clapped my hands over my ears as if to shut out the sound of that inner voice which suggested such frightful, preposterous, vague horrors, and ran faster to outdistance them. Suddenly something moved in the massed bushes just ahead and in my overwrought state, fresh terror seized me and I swerved sharply. But I had been rushing on at too mad a pace to stop myself; my foot caught in the upstanding root of a tree and I was flung forward, crashing through the hedge-like undergrowth, straight into the arms of a man.

They were strong arms, and held me firmly, but I was too breathless to cry out. I steadied myself and looked up into a pair of eyes which I knew; the eyes of the strange young man.

"Oh!" I gasped. "It's you."

"What is it?" he asked. "What has frightened you?"

His voice sounded steady and reassuring and sane, and my scattered wits began to come back to me. I realized that I was clinging to him in a most absurd fashion, and I loosened my grasp quickly, and stepped back. I began to laugh, I don't know why, for there certainly wasn't anything funny in the situation. The worst of it was I couldn't stop! I laughed and laughed, with little catching sobs between, which seemed to tear me apart, inside, and I could feel myself swaying.

"Stop it!" he commanded, in a very stern voice. "Stop it at once!"

He sat me down on a fallen log as if I had been a child, and held something to my lips.

"Here, drink this, and try to control yourself."

It was a traveling cup, filled with clear, ice-cold spring water, and I drank it thankfully. I felt better almost at once, and more calm, but queer and dazed.

"You—you shook me!" I murmured accusingly, as I handed him back the cup.

"I should have done more than that; I would have slapped you, if you hadn't stopped," he remarked, in the coolest way imaginable. "I had to bring you to yourself, you know. You were hysterical. You feel better now?"

"Yes," I answered weakly. "I can't think what made me laugh like that. I never was so silly before in all my life."

"Suppose you tell me what was the matter?" he suggested, very gently.

"N-nothing." It was a very lame answer, but how could I tell him I had been frightened by a flowerbed? "I saw something that—that scared me, and I started to run, and then you moved, here in the bushes just ahead of me, and I didn't know what it was, and that frightened me more. I tried to turn, but I tripped and fell right in upon you."

"What was it you saw that frightened you?" he persisted.

"It wasn't anything!" I heard myself protesting. "It was just my nerves, I think. I fancied the thing I saw looked like something else, and it startled me.

"Was it alive?"

"No!" I shuddered. "Don't let's talk about it, please. It's really too silly of me. I want to forget it."

"You mean that you don't want to tell me," he said, quietly. "I beg your pardon. I did not wish to seem curious, I thought I might help you."

"I know that," I replied quickly. "You are very kind, but it was just imagination on my part. I must have startled you when I crashed through the bushes."

"Your appearance was a little sudden," he smiled, and stooping, began to gather up some large sheets of paper which were scattered about. A writing case lay overturned on the mossy bank of the spring, and Laddie was guarding it zealously. A picnic hamper,

with a huge vacuum bottle beside it, was under a nearby tree.

I saw as he picked them up, that the sheets of paper were covered with writing, and the young man smiled as he answered my enquiring glance.

"My work. Laddie and I have loafed shamelessly since we came, and today we were making up for lost time."

"And I disturbed you," I supplemented. "I'm dreadfully sorry——"

"We aren't. The interruption was a very welcome one, wasn't it Laddie, old man?"

Laddie's abbreviated tail wiggled a joyous assent.

"You write books?" I asked in surprise.

The young man patted the papers into a neat even little pile and thrust them into the writing case before he replied.

"My first, and from the amount of work it has been I'm inclined to believe that it will be my last."

"What is it about?" I was quite unconscious until afterwards of my shameless curiosity.

"Oh, not fiction!" he assured me hastily. "A treatise—an account, if you like—on big game hunting in Upper India."

"Goodness!" I exclaimed, "Is that what you've been doing?"

He nodded.

"Just returned from there. It's a wonderful country, India, and there's no game in the world so exciting as tiger stalking in the Hills!"

"Oh-h!" I shuddered again. "I shouldn't like to stalk anything! I should be more likely to run!"

"As you did just now?" he laughed. "It's great sport, really, but it's awfully tedious to try to write it up afterwards. I promised a chap I know, a publisher, that I'd do it for him, or I would have funk'd it long ago. I came up here to finish it."

"And is it almost completed?" I asked. He would be going away when it was. Not that it made a difference to me, of course, for I shouldn't ever see him again, in any event. It was sheer accident which led to the fact that I was sitting there talking to him at that moment.

"Oh, there's two or three weeks of solid work before me still," he replied with unnecessary haste. "I'm not nearly through."

Laddie had been sniffing suggestively about the hamper and now he came and sat at his master's feet, his little wrinkled black nose lifted appealingly.

"By Jove! I forgot!" the young man rose. "I apologize, old man! Miss Smith, do you know what we're going to do now? We three will have a picnic—you and Laddie and I."

"I'm not——" I began, but he interrupted me in the most irresistible light-hearted way.

"Yes you are! You really invited yourself, you know, by joining us so precipitately. The least you can do is to play hostess for us. Laddie is a perfectly reliable chaperone, if you are thinking of that, and the tea is genuine rare orange pekoe; I brought it from China myself."

When he interrupted me, I was going to tell him that I was not Miss Smith, but since I would never talk with him again, anyway, it did not matter. Besides, I didn't know his name. I took it for granted that he must be young Mr. Barford, but he hadn't told me, and I couldn't be sure.

Before I could remonstrate he had the vacuum bottle uncorked, and the steaming fragrance of that tea decided me. I was doing a perfectly unpardonable thing of course, but I had no business to have scraped acquaintance with him in the first place, and I might as well see the adventure through, as long as I was in for it.

The hamper contained biscuits for Laddie, and a very substantial, masculine sort of a meal; thick meat sandwiches, and hard boiled eggs, and crackers and cheese.

"It isn't very dainty, I'm afraid," my host observed regretfully, as he sat back on his heels and surveyed the repast. "We subsist chiefly on the provisions obtainable in the village grocery store over on the main-

land, but we would have made an extra effort, Laddie and I, if we had anticipated your coming."

"It looks very good," I said. "I believe I'm awfully hungry."

I was. The tea was simply delicious, and we ate every scrap of food, Laddie helping obligingly. When we had finished, I washed the tea things at the spring and my host dried them with the paper napkins and repacked the hamper. I noticed all at once that it had grown very dark.

"Why, the sun must have gone down!" I remembered, with a guilty pang, how the previous afternoon had flown. "It can't be twilight already!"

"It isn't later than five," he returned. "I'm afraid there's a storm coming."

"Oh, there is!" I exclaimed in alarm. "The wind is rising. We must go back as quickly as we can! You have much farther to go than I."

"I'll walk back with you——" he began, but I interrupted him confusedly.

"Oh, no, please! I—I won't be frightened again!"

"You are sure?" He smiled, adding. "Then cut straight across to the other side of the island, and go home along the beach; it is the most direct way."

I held out my hand, with a little pang of regret that it was all over.

"Goodbye," my voice was scarcely audible. "And

thank you for asking me to stay for your party. I enjoyed it very much, Mr. Barford."

He looked up quickly, and opened his lips to speak, but hesitated, oddly. Then, as he took my hand, he said: "Goodbye. Laddie and I appreciate the honor you have done us, and we hope you will come again."

I shook my head laughingly, and he parted the bushes for me to pass. He was still standing there, looking after me, and he smiled, and waved his hand. I waved in return, and hastened on. I could feel myself blushing stupidly, and I would have given worlds if he had not seen me stop and look back. A nice opinion he must have of me, anyway, talking and picnicing with a man I'd never met properly. It wasn't at all the sort of a thing a nice girl would have done, but it's awfully hard to be a nice girl all the time!

I was so busy with my thoughts as I scurried through the woods that I quite forgot my panic of the early afternoon, and the object that had caused it. The wind was thrashing the branches of the trees about angrily, and the first drops of rain fell as I reached the beach.

I ran as quickly as I could along the hard, sun-baked sand, and as I neared the house it seemed to me that I heard subdued shouting. I tried to go faster, but I was breathless. The rain was coming down in torrents and the gale buffeted me unmercifully.



As I staggered on, I heard Aunt Julie's voice from the veranda calling excitedly for Lucie, and wondered what could be the matter. Then, as I passed a clump of sumac bushes, someone leaped from behind them and caught my arm roughly, and a harsh voice shouted in my ear: "Imbecile! Where have you been! Mon Dieu, how dared you frighten us so!"

It was Monsieur Pelissier.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *Fate.*

**W**ILL you let go my arm, please," I said quietly. I was so angry that I began to tremble, and I was afraid to speak again, or fear I should say too much.

His face had been distorted with a perfectly fiendish look of rage, but at the sound of my voice he came to himself and stepped back with a sickly smile.

"Mademoiselle!" he stammered. "A thousand pardons! I was beside myself with anxiety for you!"

"Why?" I asked coldly. "Is there anything on Sunset Island to fear?"

He flashed a quick look at me before he replied:

"But the storm, Miss Waring! It is not safe in the forest, trees may fall——"

I walked on without deigning to reply. Voices called to us from the veranda, and he shouted reassuringly in response. They were all awaiting us, and Aunt Julie swept me into her arms.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried. "I have been so anxious for you! Where on earth were you? You must promise me not to stray away by yourself again."

"I am sorry if I have caused you any worry," I replied. "I was sitting by the spring in the woods when I noticed how dark it was growing, and I hurried home as fast as I could."

It was the literal truth, but I felt my face grow warm, nevertheless, beneath her solicitous eyes.


"I have told Miss Waring but just now of the danger of falling trees, in the storm," Monsieur Pelissier volunteered.

Aunt Julie shuddered.

"Oh, I had such a fright last summer, Maida. Lorna was out in just such a storm like this and a great oak fell within a foot of her! I shall never forget it!—But you're soaking wet, child. Run quickly and change, and I'll send Lucie to you with some nice hot tea."

I didn't want any more tea, and I didn't feel like going down stairs again, either, and having that hateful Monsieur Pelissier near me. I could not understand how he had dared to speak as he had to me,—or why, for that matter.

I did not go down until dinner time, and during the meal I never once glanced at Monsieur Pelissier. He led the conversation adroitly, and made endless endeavors to draw me into it, but I made no response, and



even his effrontery was not equal to tempting a direct snub by addressing me personally.

Later, in the drawing room, to my great relief, Mr. Fordyce came to me, and we had a long talk about Daddy. He did not discuss the business side of their association, of course, but spoke feelingly of their warm friendship of so many years standing. He had a keen, direct way of regarding one, which made me feel that he could see straight into my brain and know my thoughts before I uttered them. It would have made me uncomfortable, I think, but for his kind, fatherly manner, and the knowledge that he was really a friend.

The storm increased in violence during the night. The rain drove in sheets against my windows and the house, solidly built as it was, fairly shook in the great blasts of the wind. Once, as I lay listening to the roar of the tempest, I heard the dull booming crash which told of a falling tree, and I thought of Aunt Julie's fears for me, and Monsieur Pelissier's inexplicable rage. I was glad of the encounter for one reason; it gave me the best of excuses for avoiding him deliberately and openly in the future, and I meant fully to avail myself of it.

The morning dawned clear and bright, although the wind was still high, and the sea was covered with rolling crests of foam.

Mr. Fordyce left early.

"Goodbye, little Miss Princess!" he said, as he held my hand on the veranda steps. "I am glad that I have had this opportunity of knowing you, and hope I shall see much of you in the future. You have our friend's dearest possession in your keeping, Mrs. Smith," he added, turning to Aunt Julie, "take good care of her."

"I mean to!" she laughed, slipping her arm about my waist, "She has become very precious to all of us, too!"

To my surprise Monsieur Pelissier took Mr. Fordyce to the mainland in the launch alone, Alaric remaining with us on the veranda.

We watched the launch until it rounded the wooded curve at the end of the island. It pitched and tossed perilously on the choppy sea, and they all seemed apprehensive, Lorna particularly so. She said very little, but moved about restlessly, in such obvious perturbation, that Aunt Julie exclaimed finally:

"Heavens and earth! Lorna, do sit down and keep still! You get on my nerves mooning around like that. There's nothing to worry about; Raoul can handle that boat as well as Alaric."

Lorna replied with a hard, hysterical little laugh.

"Nevertheless, Alaric didn't go with them!" she returned. "If anything happens——"

"Nothing can happen! Don't be a fool, Lorna!" Aunt Julie spoke more sharply than I had ever heard her. "Mr. Fordyce would not have attempted to go had there been any danger."

Lorna shrugged, and did not make any response. She presently wandered down the steps and disappeared on the path leading to the boat-house.

"What do you think of him, Maida ; of Mr. Fordyce, I mean?" asked Aunt Julie.

"Oh, he's splendid!" I replied earnestly. "I'm so glad he's Daddy's friend. You feel as if you could trust him, absolutely, from the very first time he looks at you!"

"Yes, he does impress one that way," she returned, thoughtfully. "I have never had a moment's regret that I put my affairs into his hands."

"He's a clever old bird, I'll say that for him," Alaric remarked, with a grin. "I guess he knows his game pretty well, and he certainly plays it to the limit."

"Alaric, how can you talk so!" his mother exclaimed. "I should like to know just where we would all be, if he hadn't managed our affairs so nicely!"

So there had been a crisis, then, in their financial operations: Aunt Julie's anxiety before his coming must have been well founded, but evidently the matter, whatever it was, had been satisfactorily arranged.

"I think he is a very nice old gentleman," observed Bijou, patronizingly. "In fact, I believe, Maida, that mother has had a matrimonial eye on him for some time."

"Bijou!" Aunt Julie's tone was scandalized. "What an idea! I don't think anyone would care to undertake

being a stepfather to you children!—Isn't it nearly time for Raoul to return?"

"Yes, if he started back at once," Alaric replied. "I don't see any signs of the launch, though. I wonder what's keeping him?"

An hour passed and still he did not come. Then another, and no one made any attempt to conceal the anxiety the delay had caused. The wind had died down, and the sea was much calmer, so I knew there must be some cause for their apprehension other than the safety of the launch, but it was not discussed. Lorna reappeared, and passed on quickly into the house without a word to us, but one glance at her white, strained face showed me at last, beyond a doubt, that it was she and not Bijou, whose happiness was at stake, and I was genuinely sorry for her.

I picked up a book and tried to read, but the tension which held the others communicated itself to me, and I could not fix my mind on the story. There was some mystery on foot, and although it obviously did not concern me, I could not keep my thoughts from it. What could it be which was hanging over them all?

Finally a relieved shout from Alaric told us that the launch was coming at last. He leaped the veranda railing and ran toward the boat-house, and at the sound of his voice Lorna appeared in the doorway. She had been crying, but she didn't seem to care whether we noticed it or not.

In a few minutes, which seemed interminable, we saw Alaric and Monsieur Pelissier approaching. The Frenchman was talking rapidly, in a low voice which was indistinguishable to us, but his gesticulations betrayed his excitement.

"Alaric tells me that you all have been anxious," he began quickly, as he mounted the steps. "I am so sorry. Monsieur Fordyce got off safely, but just as I started to return the engine broke down, and I drifted for more than an hour before I could locate the trouble, and repair it. I am desolate that you were disturbed on my account."

He spoke generally, but his eyes rested for a fraction of a second on Lorna's. Then he turned to Aunt Julie.

"I have something to tell you," he said, very slowly. "A message from Monsieur Fordyce, which he only remembered at the last moment."

They passed hastily into the house together and were closeted somewhere by themselves until lunch time. Aunt Julie's face was grave and troubled again, when she took her place at the table, and she scarcely made a pretense of eating. It was a most uncomfortable meal, and I was glad when it was over. The atmosphere of the house oppressed me, so I took my writing tablet and a book, and started for the beach.

Monsieur Pelissier had the effrontery to advance toward me when I appeared on the lawn, but I turned



my back squarely upon him and addressed Aunt Julie.

"I'm going to write some letters, and read," I said, with cold distinctness. "I will be back at tea time."

She nodded, with an absent smile, and I continued on my way. On every side there were traces of the havoc wrought by the previous night's storm. Great branches had been torn from the trees, saplings uprooted and tall bushes beaten flat in the path of the wind. I wondered if that young man had reached the bungalow safely, and if he had got very wet. Of course it made no difference to me, but I had learned from Daddy how helpless men were about such things, and he had no one to take care of him, and to do things for him, all alone up here as he was.

I had made up my mind that unless I stayed with the others all the time, which was unthinkable, I couldn't well avoid him, but I need not stop and talk; I could greet him in a pleasant, friendly way, and go on.

Quite without thinking, I took the same path which I had followed two days before, and I emerged from the woods upon the beach not far from where Laddie had unearthed the landcrab. I seated myself on the sand, with my back against a convenient rock.

I didn't feel like writing just then, so I opened my book. It wasn't very interesting, however, and after a while I began to feel a little lonely. There wasn't a sound but the dull rolling of the surf, and a deep blue haze hung over the mainland, making it look very dim

and far away. I picked up a handful of the shining, warm sand, and watched it sift through my fingers idly. I wished that I had something really absorbing to do. I wondered if I could write a book; not about big game hunting, of course, but something else. Love, maybe—only all the stories were about that, and it was so stupid——

A shadow fell across the sand at my feet, and I looked up. I didn't need Laddie's joyously welcoming bark to tell me who was approaching.

"Good afternoon," said my host of the day before, as he dropped down on the sand beside me and held out his hand. "I hope you reached home before the rain started yesterday?"

"Not quite," I replied, "but I'm not the worse for it. You and Laddie must have been drenched."

"Oh, we ran for it!" he laughed. "We liked the rain didn't we, old man?"

"You are not working today?" I glanced at his empty hands.

"No, the storm seemed to electrify the atmosphere so that I couldn't settle down to browsing over a lot of old notes.—You're not going?"

I had picked up my belongings.

"I must," I said firmly, adding with hasty mendacity. "I promised Alaric a game of tennis. Besides, the sun is very hot."

"You are going because I came." He spoke very

quietly, and there was such a hurt note in his voice that I could not meet his eyes. "Miss Smith, there's something I want to say to you. I beg your pardon for not telling you before, I should have done so yesterday,—no, when I first spoke to you, but when you took it for granted that I was young Barford, I thought I would let you think I was, for a while, just for a joke. It was a very stupid one."

"Then you're not?" I asked slowly.

"No. I am Gilbert Spear, very much at your service."

Gilbert Spear! Arnold Spear's son, who I thought was thousands of miles away! Gilbert Spear, the man whom Daddy had chosen!

"Oh—h!" I gasped. I could feel that my face was red and little spots of light dancing before my eyes.

"What is it?" he asked in surprise at my exclamation.

"I—I hurt my finger!" I fibbed, wildly. "Something sharp in the sand—a piece of shell or glass."

"Let me see it!" he demanded.

"Oh, no! It's quite all right now." I twisted my handkerchief about my hand, and added blandly although my heart was beating very fast. "So you are Mr. Spear of Boston."

"No, New York." I breathed more freely. Evidently my ruse had succeeded and he hadn't connected my agitation with the disclosure of his identity. "And

I know your name," he added, "although you haven't told me."

"I wonder if you do!" I smiled slyly to myself.

"You are Lucy," he said softly, and I stared at him in astonishment. "I heard your mother calling you last evening, after you had started for home."

So that accounted for it! He had heard Aunt Julie screaming for her maid, Lucie. An inspiration flashed through my mind. He was willing to play a joke upon me, to let me think he was Mr. Barford, when he wasn't; very well, I would turn the tables on him! I smiled, and opened my parasol again.

"I wonder how you knew!" I remarked demurely. "But that was not my mother. Mrs. Smith is my—my aunt!"

"Oh!" he said a little blankly. "And that tall, dark young man, who took the launch out this morning; is he your brother, or your cousin?"

"Neither," I replied, emphatically. "He isn't any relation at all, just a guest of Aunt Julie's. He took a friend over to the mainland, and the engine broke down on the way back. He drifted for ages before he could fix it, and Aunt Julie was dreadfully worried. She thought the launch had upset."

I scarcely realized what I was telling him. My mind was still dazed with the shock of the revelation which had come to me. It was Gilbert Spear, talking there so unconcernedly beside me!

"He broke down? Is that what he told you?"

"Why, yes. Isn't it true?" I demanded.

He paused for a moment before he replied.

"Well, if it is, the launch was caught in a very peculiar current, that's all. I happened to be cruising about in my own motor boat this morning, and I saw him land the old gentleman at the village wharf. He turned in a few minutes, and put out at the fastest clip he could go for one of the islands there to the south; I don't know just where, I didn't watch him particularly. After about an hour or so, I saw him coming back. He made a wide detour, and then headed for your cove."

I drew a deep breath.

"So he fibbed," I remarked. "I thought as much!"

"Perhaps I shouldn't have told you?" he hesitated.

"You—you don't like him?"

"No, I don't," I replied frankly. "I detest him. He's perfectly horrid, but of course I can't say that to Aunt Julie."

"Does he annoy you?" demanded Gilbert Spear.

"Oh, not in that way!" I hastened to assure him, and blushed furiously the next minute. "It is just that his mere presence is distasteful to me. He is rude, sarcastic and overbearing, but I think that one of—of my cousins, is rather favorably impressed by him."

"I see. And the other young man, is he your brother?"

"No, he is a cousin. I have no one except my father, and he is away just now."

"And you're not very happy, are you? Please don't be offended, I couldn't help seeing, since we first talked together, that everything was not right with you. Look here! Are you going to forgive me for not telling you at first who I was, and let us be good friends?"

I nodded.

"Then I want to be of service to you; I want you to let me help you, if I can. If you're unhappy about anything, and you can't tell your aunt about it, will you trust me and let me know? If that Frenchman annoys you, or whatever it was that frightened you yesterday occurs again, promise me that you will tell me?"

I looked levelly into his eyes for a long minute. Yes, I could trust him! I had felt it instinctively from the first, but now I knew.

I gave him my hand, silently, and he held it for a moment in both of his. I don't know what he would have said next, but something pointed prodded my foot sharply, and I started and laughed.

Laddie had been trying to chew the buckle off my slipper, and I hadn't even noticed it.

While he wiggled about apologetically under his master's rebuke, I watched them both. Was there ever such a coincidence in the world! That it was he, of all men, whom I should meet on this lonely, remote is-

land! Wouldn't Daddy be surprised when he found that I knew this very young man he had a sneaking desire to have me meet!—But would he? The quick thought made me cold all over. Had Daddy conspired with Arnold Spear to send that young man up there, and throw him in my way? Did he know who I really was, all the time? The coincidence seemed too suspiciously great to be true. Oh, if he had done this, I would never forgive Daddy, as long as I lived! I felt that I must know.

"How does it happen," I looked straight into his eyes again as I asked the question. "That you are here, occupying the Barford's bungalow, Mr. Spear?"

"Oh, I was in Boston, visiting the publisher chap for whom I am doing this book, and one evening I told Jimmie Barford that I wished I could find a desert island, where I could go and finish this thing in peace, and he presented me with the keys of his bungalow here and his blessing. He said that for sheer loneliness and isolation it had any desert island beaten forty ways, but I haven't found it so, although I shall not tell him of his mistake."

I was silent. My fear as to some conspiracy of Daddy's being responsible for his presence was allayed, the pure accident of our meeting was apparent, and yet a new, strange sense of shyness, of unaccountable trembling seized me. With the last words, his voice had grown softer and more low, and he stopped sud-

denly, as if there was something more he would have said, but checked himself.

He had been staring straight out to sea, but now he turned to me, with frank directness in his glance.

"Miss Smith, won't you ask me to call? Or rather, will you give me leave to introduce myself to your cousin—Alaric, I think you said his name was?"

"Oh, no!" I cried hastily. "I couldn't ask you to call, you know, they would want to know how I had met you and all that. It would be different if Daddy were here, he would understand, and I am quite sure he would not mind!" I dimpled in spite of myself, when I thought of what Daddy would be likely to say, and then grew grave again. Daddy was away off on the sea and I was here, in Aunt Julie's hands! "It wouldn't be of any use for you to know Alaric because I'm quite sure he wouldn't introduce you to Aunt Julie, or ask you to call. I do not think they would welcome any visitors."

He looked crestfallen and not a little mystified, and I decided impulsively to take him into my confidence.

"Mr. Spear," I said earnestly. "You asked me to trust you, and I am going to. I am not really unhappy but I'm puzzled about conditions at home. Until I came to visit Aunt Julie, I had not seen her or her family for some years. Daddy had to go away, and he thought it best for me to be here. He did not know it, but I have discovered that they are in some trouble



or anxiety, which everyone, even the Frenchman, seems to share, but me. That is why I do not think they would welcome any new acquaintance just now. I should not tell you this, for it concerns neither you nor me, of course, but a great many things have occurred which mystify me; little things, which no one would consider of any account, perhaps, unless they saw or experienced them."

He seemed to be watching me curiously, and now he nodded, slowly.

"I understand," he said. "That is the reason why I have come upon you so often quite by yourself."

"Yes. I was troubled, and wanted to think things out."

"Now that we are friends, will you tell me what it was which frightened you into hysterics yesterday?" He leaned nearer.

"Oh, that was nothing but a silly fancy, as I told you," I laughed. Then a sudden thought came to me. "Mr. Spear, there was a storm the night of our arrival, if you remember."

"I heard it. It was a corker while it lasted."

"Did you hear anything else—anything strange, I mean—just before it started?"

He frowned reflectively.

"I don't think I did. Oh, yes. I remember that I thought I heard something which sounded like a shout. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes. That was one of the things I couldn't understand."

"It was probably one of the men on your yacht. It seemed to come from the direction of the cove."

"So I thought," I replied. "But something else happened a little later that night, which made me doubtful. Oh, I really can't tell you, it all seems so foolish, so absurdly fanciful here in broad daylight that I don't want to talk any more about it."

"But you have said enough to show me that you are really frightened about something!" he protested, earnestly. "I don't wish to pry into your aunt's affairs, of course, or to know anything more than you wish to tell me, but if you feel that any trouble or danger of some sort threatens you, remember I hold you to your promise to come to me."

"Oh, I will gladly." I think my face must have shown the sincerity of my words. "I am so glad you are here!"

"So am I." It wasn't much of a reply, in mere words, but his tone more than made up for its brevity. I looked away hurriedly.

"But the book will soon be finished, and then you will go away."

"I shall not go while you are here, while you may need me. Laddie and I will be at your service, always." His tone was very low again and for some reason my heart began to beat more quickly.

"You are very kind," I said. "But it may be weeks and weeks before Daddy comes to take me away."

"I shall stay." He drew in his breath sharply. "Remember please, little girl, if anything troubles you, you are to let me know; if anything frightens you, come to me. I think if you even called to me, I should hear you, at any hour, day or night."

"Thank you," my voice was almost a whisper. "I shall not forget," and he helped me to my feet.

"I—I must go," I murmured, wistfully. "I promised Aunt Julie to be home at teatime."

"And the tennis?" he smiled.

"What tennis?" I asked, blankly.

"The set you promised your cousin Alaric, don't you remember?"

"That was a fib," I confessed, dropping my eyes before his laughing ones.

"I knew it. You don't prevaricate skilfully, Lucy."

Lucy! The sound of the strange name on his lips reminded me afresh of the deception I was practising upon him, which for the moment had quite slipped my mind. The impulse came to tell him the truth, there and then, but I checked it. I wanted to keep my secret a little while longer, that his surprise would be more complete when he knew. Anyway, this was only the third time we had spoken to each other, and he had no right to call me "Lucy" if he did think it was my name.

"Perhaps I don't," I acknowledged, with a little laugh. "I haven't had a great deal of practice."

"And you are not sorry now that you did not run away when I came to-day?"

He had taken my hand, and was holding it gently, but so firmly that I could not withdraw it.

"No, I am very glad," I replied, as simply as he asked the question. "I don't feel lonely or nervous any more. Goodbye, my friend, and thank you for offering to help me."

"You will remember to call upon me, if there is need?"

"I will remember."

I left him and went up the pathway toward home with my heart just singing. I was happy for the first time in so long that I had almost forgotten what it was like. All the things which had puzzled and disturbed me, melted into utter insignificance. It wasn't only that I had found a friend, but that friend was Gilbert Spear! It seemed too wonderful to realize, even yet. Surely, it was fate which had led him to Sunset Island, the one man whom I had determined not even to meet if I could help it, and to snub unmercifully if I couldn't. And now I was counting on his friendship, depending upon it, trusting him almost as I would trust Daddy! It seemed almost incomprehensible.

The family were all gathered on the lawn waiting

for tea when I approached, and Bijou glanced up and laughed shrilly.

"Heavens, you're a sight!" she cried. "Look what you are doing, Maida! You're carrying your writing case upside down, and the ink has run out all over you!"

"Your pretty dress! What a shame!" Aunt Julie supplemented. "Never mind, Lucie will get the stains out for you. But, Maida, whatever in the world has happened to the buckle on your slipper?"

## CHAPTER IX.

### *Incognito.*

**A**FTER breakfast the next morning I started out in good earnest, to find a cool, shady spot, and write some letters. I wanted to reach Daddy in London before he left for the continent, to beg him to hurry back as soon as possible. I meant to tell him of Mr. Fordyce's visit, too, but I didn't think I would mention Gilbert Spear, just yet; at least not until I had told Gilbert of my identity. Daddy might cable to Arnold Spear, and spoil my surprise.

Aunt Julie had said at breakfast that Mr. Fordyce might return before long, and I was very glad. It was odd, but the more I thought of him, the more familiar his face had seemed to me; just as I had fancied when I first met Bijou again, that I must have seen her somewhere lately, so I felt toward him.

I was walking slowly along the path leading to the

cove, when all at once my thoughts were interrupted by a slight sound behind me, as if a twig had snapped beneath a stealthy footfall. I glanced over my shoulder, but no one was to be seen, and I sauntered on. I had come to a little path which branched off to the right, and I remembered that it was somewhere about here that I had chanced upon the little clearing, two days before, where the peculiarly shaped flower-bed was. I could have laughed now, at the silly, morbid fancies it had awakened, and the sudden impulse came to me to look for it, and see if the gardener had arranged flowers in it yet.

I came upon the thicket by the spring, where I had literally fallen into Gilbert Spear's arms, and retracing my steps, I found the clearing without much difficulty, yet—was it the right spot after all? It could not be, for there wasn't any flower-bed at all, just a smooth stretch of mossy green sward. Then, as I looked closely, I discovered that an oblong space in it seemed wilted and trampled upon, and going over gingerly to its edge, I saw that the mound had been levelled and very carelessly sodded.

As I moved on, wondering why whoever had planned the flower-bed had changed their minds, I heard again, unmistakably, a soft footstep behind me, and the rustle of branches as someone parted the bushes. I was being followed! Why, and by whom I could not imagine, but I determined to find out. I did not look around,

but kept straight on slowly until I came to a sharp curve in the path. Then I slipped quickly behind a screening clump of bushes, and waited.

The footsteps drew nearer, and presently a man appeared, walking with a stealthy, cat-like tread, and peering sharply ahead. It was Monsieur Pelissier! I stepped quietly from behind the bushes, and faced him.

"May I ask you why you are following me, Monsieur?" I demanded coldly.

He started in surprise at my abrupt appearance, and then smiled blandly as he uncovered his head.

"I, Mademoiselle——?" he began, but I cut him short.

"Yes. I have been aware for some time that I was being followed. Will you tell me why, please?"

I stood my ground, and looked firmly into his shifting eyes, and he shrugged with a gesture of half mocking appeal.

"I will admit, Miss Waring, I am guilty. I did follow you."

"I should like to know for what purpose?" I persisted.

"Can you ask?" He rolled his eyes beseechingly. "See! I am desolate, in disgrace because of two days ago. You have not granted me a look, a word, an opportunity to abase myself, to ask your pardon for my rudeness, my *gaucherie*! Ah, mademoiselle, if you could know my fears, my anxiety for you in the storm



which was approaching, you would understand and forgive my ill-chosen words when I came upon you."

"Perhaps I should," I returned, with involuntary frankness. "There is a great deal about you that I do not understand, Monsieur Pelissier. If I knew the nature of your fears for me that day, I might be able to comprehend many things which are obscure to me."

He shot a lightning glance at me. Then his face changed swiftly, and he smiled.

"I am delighted to have awakened your interest, Mademoiselle. . . . You will permit?"

He lighted a cigarette airily but his hand trembled a little, and he tossed the match quickly aside.

"My fears for you?" He went on, smoothly. "Surely they are not incomprehensible? You were in very real danger, alone in the forest in that rising wind, with trees crashing down all about you! Mrs. Smith was almost beside herself with anxiety, and as for me, I scarcely realized what I said when I found you, unharmed, my relief was so great. You will be kind, and try to forget that little incident, or forgive it on the score of my solicitude for you?"

I shook my head.

"I assure you that I do not wish to remember it, Monsieur, nor do I wish to talk with you. I do not see any need of continuing this conversation further. I am going home. Will you allow me to pass, please?"

Considering that he was Aunt Julie's guest, that was

putting it as strongly as I dared, and I should have thought that anyone with the merest instinct of a gentleman would have accepted it, and taken himself away from my presence as quickly as possible. But Monsieur Pelissier was evidently made of different clay.

"Do not tell me that I have in one little moment offended beyond reparation, I implore you, Mademoiselle!" He spread his hands out, palm upwards, and elevated his shoulders appealingly. His voice held no trace of resentment at the tone which I had taken. "*Tiens!* I have apologized, most humbly, I have done all in my power to make amends. I am of a temperament—how do you say?—excitable, impetuous, and I was half-crazed with anxiety. My rudeness was almost beyond pardon, I know, but it was quite without intent. Surely you will not be so cruel as to refuse my apology?"

He had me at a disadvantage there. We were both guests of Aunt Julie's, and as such I could not absolutely ignore his presence, as I most emphatically should have done under other circumstances, without an explanation which would have made the situation an extremely awkward one for all of us.

"No, Monsieur Pelissier," I said, at last. "I cannot refuse to accept your apology, of course. We will say no more about it."

"Will you not be still more generous, and say that

we are to be friends?" he begged. "I am sure that you would take pity on me, if you could know how I have suffered under you displeasure these last two days!"

I saw that the only hope of ending this interview quickly, before I lost my temper and precipitated a scene, lay in acquiescence. He would have stood there ignoring all snubs blocking my pathway and apologizing until sunset, if I didn't.

So I smiled a weak, surface smile which I was far from feeling, and observed:

"Friends, Monsieur? Perhaps. That will depend upon the future. And now I really must return to the house. If you will let me pass——"

"I will go with you!" he announced, with alacrity, and I resigned myself to the inevitable.

He tried to make conversation, of a sort, but I discouraged it bluntly, and after a time he desisted, and we walked on almost in silence. We came at length to a break in the curving line of the beach, where a neck of the woods jutted out into the water, forming a tiny peninsula, and to my surprise, voices sounded beyond it; young voices, several of them, and laughter, and little subdued shrieks.

I looked at Monsieur Pelissier. His eyes were flashing and his face fairly distorted with rage as it had been when he came upon me in the storm. He sprang forward and instinctively I followed him, but he turned upon me.

"Stay back!" he commanded, harshly. "I will attend to these interlopers, Mademoiselle! You will remain here!"

My seething temper boiled up at the insolent dominance of his tone, but I stepped back involuntarily, before the violence of his manner, and he rushed on.

The lighthearted chorus of voices ceased suddenly, and I heard a sharp exclamation from his lips, followed by a perfect stream of vituperation.

I crept forwards and peered between the bushes. Two launches were drawn up on the beach and a merry party of young people had been scurrying about, unloading picnic hampers and gathering driftwood for a fire. They had stopped paralyzed with surprise at Monsieur Pelissier's sudden appearance and onslaught.

His words were an almost unintelligible torrent of French and English combined, but his tone was unmistakably insulting, and one of the young men, taller and more tanned than the rest, stepped forward, flushing a little.

"*Canaille!*" Monsieur Pelissier snarled, fairly dancing with rage. "How dare you land here with your miserable peecneec? Do you not know that you are upon private property? You shall leave at once, do you comprehend? At once, and do not dare to approach this island again!"

"Look here, sir!" the young man said, indignantly.

"There's no reason for you to adopt that tone with us. We didn't know we were trespassing; we've picnicked here for four years and there's never been any objection raised before. Of course, we'll leave right away, there isn't any need for you to be so uncivil about it!"

"Onceevil! Onceevil!" the snarl rose to a scream. "How dare you! *Cochon!* Go before I pull your nose for you——"

"Come on and try it!" the young man invited with a chuckle, suddenly regaining his temper, as the last vestige of Monsieur Pelissier's self-control vanished. "Come on, you hollow-chested, narrow-shouldered French shrimp, and I'll show you what I'll do to you! Who are you, anyway? You don't belong on this island!"

"Oh, Charlie, don't!" one of the girls laid her hand on his arm. "It isn't worth while. Come, let's go just as quickly as we can. What's the good of a row? We *are* trespassing, you know."

After a long look at Monsieur Pelissier, the young man turned somewhat reluctantly, and helped to reload the launches. No further recriminations were exchanged and in a few minutes they backed out into the bay, and headed for one of the other islands.

Monsieur Pelissier stood watching them, until the launches were mere specks upon the water. Then suddenly he remembered me and turned. He was still flushed with anger, and his attempt at a smile died

when he read the scorn and disgust in my eyes.

"It was insufferable!" he muttered, as if in self-defense. "One is not safe from the intrusion of the common people, even here! Mademoiselle will pardon the distressing scene. It was in execrable taste, but one must protect oneself against trespassers and vagabonds."

"They were not vagabonds!" I protested. "Why should they not have remained? What harm could they possibly do? They looked as if they were having a lovely time when you interrupted them! You need not have been so discourteous, in any event, Monsieur."

I could not help adding that; I was indignant at his unnecessarily violent outburst, and I felt sure that even easy-going Aunt Julie would resent his abrogating to himself the authority to order anyone away so insultingly.

"I am acting for Mrs. Smith," he returned, with an injured air. "I know that she desires no trespassers——"

"Weren't you a little hasty in that assumption?" I asked. "The young man said that they had been coming here unmolested for years."

"You heard?" he darted a quick look at me, then added with a laugh. "Nevertheless, you will find, Mademoiselle, that I have only carried out the wishes of Mrs. Smith."

And to my great surprise, his prediction proved well-founded. As soon as we reached the house, he plunged into a highly colored account of the incident, and Aunt Julie was agitated beyond all proportion to what had occurred.

"I have not overstepped my authority?" he asked, suavely, when the episode had been thoroughly discussed. "Miss Waring was surprised, I think, that I should have taken it upon myself to order them away."

"I am heartily grateful to you for doing so!" Aunt Julie returned, with a cold glance at me. "I hope you were sufficiently emphatic to keep them from returning again. The effrontery of these villagers is amazing! I will not have trespassers on this island!"

Considering that the Barfords owned a part of it, and that the lighthouse end was the property of the government, I thought she was a trifle more arrogant than the circumstances warranted, but of course I kept my opinion to myself. I wondered what she would say when she knew that Gilbert Spear was on the island, and who he was. It seemed a miracle that they had none of them discovered his presence before this.

I didn't try to make any excuses to myself, but after lunch I slipped away, and started out deliberately to find him. I didn't care a whit, that we hadn't met conventionally, now that I knew who he really was.

I was sure Daddy would think it was all right, and I

didn't mind anyone else's opinion. Only I felt that my little joke had been silly, and I intended to tell him the truth about my identity at the earliest opportunity.

I went first in the direction of the cove, in case Monsieur Pelissier should again be following me to force his detestable society upon me, and then doubled back and made straight through the kitchen garden, which was screened with tall hollyhocks from any view from the windows of Hard-a-lee.

As I entered the woods on the farther side I saw a figure moving toward me along the path ahead, and stopped in dismay. If it was that odious Monsieur Pelissier——! Then a muffled but joyous bark reached my ears, and I smiled in relief and walked on.

"I was waiting for you," Gilbert said simply, as he clasped my hand. "I hoped that you would come, and I did not think you would try the beach after this morning.

"This morning?" I echoed. "You saw——"

"The reception that was tendered the picnic party? Yes. Your French friend is quite temperamental, isn't he?"

"Don't! You know what I think of him!" I protested. "It was disgraceful, wasn't it? The worst of it is, that when we reached home Aunt Julie quite upheld him in what he had done. He might at least have been courteous about it, and I told him so! You see now how out of the question it would be for you



to call, even though you are not a trespasser, of course. I am sure that Aunt Julie means to keep in strict retirement."

"Nevertheless, I wish that I might call," he said, decidedly. "I shouldn't want anyone to blame you, if we were discovered talking together. They might think I—I was trying to flirt with you!"

"Well, I know you're not," I returned, comfortably. "I will tell Daddy all about it, of course, when he comes, and I know he'll understand, as I told you yesterday. It really doesn't matter to me what Aunt Julie or any of the rest think."

Gilbert looked rather doubtful.

"They could make it very unpleasant for you, you know! Little girl, I wouldn't bring a moment's unhappiness upon you for the world, or a single wrong thought! Let me introduce myself to your cousin!"

"No," I said decidedly. "It wouldn't do, Mr. Spear. It wouldn't be of any use, and they would take good care that neither the other girls nor I should encounter you. I don't know the reason for this queer, unsociable seclusion, but I'm convinced that Aunt Julie would insist on it."

"I'm sorry. We must take care, then, that they don't come upon us, particularly the French person. What is his name?"

"Pelissier," I answered, "Raoul Pelissier."

"That's an odd name," remarked Gilbert, thought-

fully. "I know a man who called himself that once six years ago, but he couldn't be any connection of your aunt's guest, of course. The man I speak of was a steamship crook, a gambler on a P. and O. boat off the China coast."

"No," I laughed. "He could scarcely have been a relation of this Monsieur Pelissier, and yet I don't know. I believe him to be an adventurer, a fortune hunter of the worst type. Surely that is as bad."

Gilbert laughed too.

"Oh, this chap on board the Empress, didn't look at all like him, anyway. You spoke of one of your cousins being favorably impressed by him, and now you call him a fortune hunter. Do you think, then, that your cousin will marry him?"

"I'm afraid so!" I nodded slowly. "Oh, I wish Daddy were here now! He would see through him at once, I know, and make Aunt Julie listen!"

"Will he return soon?" Gilbert looked away.

"I don't know. He's gone to Europe you know.— Oh, won't he be surprised when he comes back, and learns that I have met you, on this queer out-of-the-way little corner of the earth!"

"Surprised?" asked Gilbert. "Why?"

"Because," I began, and hesitated. "Because—Mr. Spear, I have a confession to make to you. It was such fun to turn the tables on you that I really couldn't resist it. I—I'm not——"

I paused in astonishment, as he grasped my arm suddenly, and glanced at him. His face was set in a strained, listening expression, and he motioned me to silence, although I could not hear a sound save the rustle and whisper of the trees. At length, he leaned over with his lips close to my ear, and murmured tonelessly:

"Someone is coming, advancing a few steps at a time and then stopping, as if looking for something. Come to the spring where we had tea, tomorrow morning, if you can get away. I'm going to slip off now. You sit quietly where you are for half an hour and then get up and stroll slowly home. Understand, little girl? Goodbye."

He pressed my hand and disappeared, gliding silently through the bushes with Laddie at his heels. I curled my feet up under me on the moss, leaned comfortably against a tree, and opened the book which I had carried, but the letters danced before my eyes. I was listening, listening with all my ears.

At last I did hear something, that same stealthy, cat-like tread of the morning, and I could feel my cheeks flame as my temper rose at his surveillance.

The footsteps came nearer, then halted suddenly, as if I had evidently been discovered. After a pause, the man came on, humming airily to himself, obviously for effect. I did not raise my eyes from my book, until he halted beside me, with an expression of surprise.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, again I come upon you!"

I looked up at him, a long, slow look, until his eyes shifted and fell.

"Yes. Curious, isn't it, Monsieur?"

"Will you not ask me to share your cool, shady retreat?" he asked, smiling insistently. "It is very inviting, but tantalizing the solitude in which you envelope yourself."

His words may have been idle ones, but I fancied all at once they held an ironical significance. I closed my book with a snap.

"It would scarcely be worth while," I said coolly. "I was on the point of returning to the house when you appeared."

"You are still unkind? Only this morning you agreed that we were to be friends; have I offended again? Mademoiselle is too young and charming to cherish resentment, enmity! Nor is it always wise. One may never know when one will need a friend, Miss Waring."

He spoke lightly, half laughingly, but beneath his tone there seemed a note of warning. With what was he threatening me? That there was some purpose in his attitude was apparent. Whatever it was, he would not have gone so far unless he felt that he held some advantage over me. Could he have seen me with Gilbert, and put his own vulgar construction on our meeting? If that was the stand he meant to take, I

decided on a swift impulse to meet him on his own ground.

"That is true," I replied. "But one finds friends in all sorts of unlikely places. I really meant to return to the house to write some letters. When do you go again to the mainland?"

"Alaric will run over in the morning, I believe. I do not seem to have great success in the management of that launch."

"No?" I smiled in my turn, and added. "Tell me, Monsieur, what does a motor boat do when the engine breaks down?"

"It stops, of course, and one drifts, as I did yesterday morning. It was maddening."

"You drifted quite far, didn't you?" I asked quietly enough, but the shot took effect.

He had been leaning nonchalantly against a tree, switching aimlessly at a young maple shoot with his stick. Now he straightened himself and darted a swift enigmatic glance at me.

"For an hour or so, Mademoiselle, as you know, before I could discover what was wrong, and repair the engine," he replied quickly.

"There are some peculiar currents about the coast here, are there not?" I pursued, blandly.

"What do you mean?" He took a step forward, involuntarily, and the set smile disappeared from his face.

"It was odd that you were carried so far to the south, and so swiftly." I met his eyes then, without attempting to conceal the significance in mine."

"Mademoiselle has sharp eyes." He drew in his breath quickly. "But as one grows older one learns the wisdom of being blind, sometimes!"

"Indeed, Monsieur?" I raised my eyebrows a trifle. "I'm afraid I don't follow you!"

"Miss Waring." His manner all at once became soft and appealing and he spoke with an assumption of disarming frankness. "I will tell you the truth. You will, I am sure, respect my confidence. The engines did not break down. Instead I took that opportunity to perform a mission of my own. There is a lady whose summer home is upon one of the islands to the south. It was an affair of the heart, you comprehend. I should not perhaps speak of it, but in America, the young girls understand these things. The lady was insistent, and it is always well to be off with the old love before one is on with the new, is it not so? It was most affecting——" he paused, with an impressive sigh, "but necessary. Naturally I could not have explained the circumstances to Lorna, she would not have permitted herself to believe, and so I stole away for an hour or two."

I did not believe a word of it, myself, but I smiled up at him as sweetly as I could.

"We will say no more about it, Monsieur. As you

say it is purely your own affair. It is already—almost—forgotten. And now we really must go back.”

He assisted me to my feet, and loathing him as I did, I tried not to shrink from the touch of his hand. We made our way homeward almost in silence, but just before we reached the pergola at the end of the kitchen garden, he paused.

“You may not be an adept at fencing, Mademoiselle, but permit me to say you would make an admirable chessplayer.”

I smiled, in spite of myself. I knew what he meant. Checkmate!

## CHAPTER X,

### *The Last Straw.*

**A**LARIC did go to the mainland the next morning, and brought back a great surprise for me; a letter from Daddy! It had been hastily written on board the *Bosnia*, and sent back with the pilot.

"Dear Little Princess," it read; "just a few lines to tell you how sorry I am that you are not sailing with me, but don't feel too badly about it. We'll go over next year together, sure, and do it all up in fine style. Fordyce told me he might run up to Sunset Island. Hope he does, you'll like him. Be a good girl and mind Aunt Julie, and I'll bring you the littlest, yappiest mutt of a Pekinese I can find. I'll write again from London. Love,

DADDY."

My eyes filled, and a lump came into my throat. Dear Daddy! How he remembered my lightest word! Two months before, in his office, I had simply raved



about the most adorable Pekinese, a prize winner at the dog show, but he didn't buy it for me because of course I could not have kept it at Miss Farmingdale's. He hadn't forgotten, though. I smiled back as I thought of the time he would probably have getting it back to America.

"What is it, Maida?" asked Aunt Julie. "You are smiling all to yourself."

"I have a letter from Daddy," I replied. "Just a note, written on shipboard. He's going to bring me a dog."

"You'll be sorry. They're an awful nuisance," Bijou observed. "Do you know I heard one barking last night."

"You must have been dreaming," returned Aunt Julie. "There isn't a dog on the island."

I knew better, of course, but I didn't look at Monsieur Pelissier. I was rather sure that he knew, too.

"Say, I've got something to tell you," Alaric spoke to us all, but his eyes met his mother's. "There's somebody in that Barford bungalow."

"Impossible!" Aunt Julie exclaimed. "You know it hasn't been occupied for years."

"Well, it is now. I cruised down that way a little and I saw smoke coming out of the chimney, and there's a launch tied up at the dock."

"Good Heavens, the Barfords can't have returned!" There was something very like consternation in her

voice, and I glanced quickly at her. She had turned very white, and the opened letter which she held in her hand trembled.

"Oh, no!" I cried, thoughtlessly. "Not the Barfords!"

The very next moment I saw what I had done, but it was too late.

"I—I have seen a young man there, with a dog," I replied confusedly. "I don't believe there is anyone else about the place."

"How is it that Mademoiselle knows this young man is not a Barford?" Monsieur Pelissier's voice was very calm, but there was a peculiar glint in his eyes. "You have perhaps talked with him, flirted with him, eh?"

"I believe she has!" cried Bijou suddenly, with a jangling, unpleasant laugh. "No wonder she slips away by herself all the time! You're slick, Maida!"

"I most certainly have not flirted with him!" I returned hotly. "I have spoken to him casually. I am surprised at your daring to use such a tone to me, Monsieur!"

"And I am surprised at you, Maida!" Aunt Julie cried. Her voice was cold and cuttingly distinct, and the lisp was gone. "Who is this man you have picked up?"

"He is a—a friend of the Barfords, to whom they have lent their bungalow for a time," I stammered.

I was on the verge of tears in my shame and disgust at their attitude, but some instinct warned me not to disclose Gilbert's identity. "And I didn't pick him up, Aunt Julie, not in the way you suggest. There was no harm whatever in my speaking to him. I have done nothing wrong."

"Nothing wrong? You wretched, low-bred little hussy! How dare you scrape acquaintance with a strange man!"

"Mother! Control yourself!" Lorna's voice in sharp command fell upon my stunned ears. "Maida meant, I am sure, to do nothing out of the way. How often have you seen him, talked with him?" she added, turning to me. "He knows who you are, of course?"

"No, he does not know who I am!" I retorted passionately. "And I decline to answer any more of your questions! I will not stand here and be catechised like a naughty chid! I have done nothing that I should not do, nothing that my father would object to, and I am not accountable to any of you for my actions."

"I'll show you whether you are or not!" Aunt Julie screamed, beside herself with rage. "You stuck-up, sanctimonious little brat! You'll find out before you're through with me that you're very much accountable to me for what you do! The idea! Sneaking out of here so innocently every day with your book, and carrying on a flirtation under my very nose with a perfect stranger! It takes you sly ones to be up to something

devilish the first chance you get! You're not dealing with your Miss Farmingdale, now, and pulling the wool over her eyes—or your father either! I'll see that you have precious little opportunity in the future to go about philandering with a strange man, you deceitful, unprincipled girl!"

Lorna tried to interrupt her torrent of abuse, but she turned upon them all in a fury.

"It's a pity none of you knew what was going on!" she raged. "Haven't you got any eyes? Good heavens, can I do everything, be everywhere at once? I am responsible for her! What would her father say if anything should happen——"

"Nothing will happen, mother," Lorna intervened. "No harm has been done. Maida was a little indiscreet that is all. You are very silly to get so excited."

"You'll make a fool of yourself, if you don't shut up!" Alaric spoke for the first time since he had launched that bomb-shell about Gilbert's presence, and he spoke with a harsh authority which his mother, irate as she was, seemed to recognize.

I looked straight into her vixenish, snapping eyes.

"You forget yourself, Mrs. Smith," I said quietly, although my voice trembled. "I am your guest, and I will go to my room until you remember that fact."

Without glancing at any of the rest, I turned and went into the house. I held my head very high, but I

stumbled as I made my way up the stairs, for my eyes were blurred with tears. I had never been spoken to in that manner in all my life before. I felt as if I had been beaten, and my whole body was shaking with great sobs. I prayed that I might reach the seclusion of my room before I broke down utterly.

I crept there blindly, locked the door, and flung myself on the couch in a paroxysm of weeping. Oh, how could Daddy have subjected me to this? Why did he leave me all alone with such dreadful people, at the mercy of that horrible woman! How vilely common she had shown herself to be! The Aunt Julie I remembered had been a simple, kindly, whole-hearted woman, not a low-minded, bitter-tongued virago! Certainly I had done nothing to call down upon me such an avalanche of invective. What wicked, coarse names she had hurled at me! I shuddered when I thought of them.

At any rate, this was the end, the very last straw! I sat up and dried my eyes, resolved upon that point. This beautiful island had become hateful to me, Hard-a-lee a veritable prison. I could not, would not endure it until Daddy came home. I would send for Miss Farmingdale at once, to come and take me away. If I explained the circumstances fully to her, I was sure that she would understand and act at once. I would write Daddy, too, and tell him everything, and I knew that he would not blame me. He might even hurry

back to America, and take me away with him, but even if he didn't, it would be better, a thousand times better, to spend the rest of the summer alone with Miss Farmingdale in that austere, deserted school, than with these utterly impossible people! Only I must manage, somehow, to see Gilbert once more before I left and tell him the truth.

I rose, and started toward the writing-table, when I heard a step in the hallway, and someone knocked at the door.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"It's I, Lorna. Please let me come in for a minute, Maida."

Her tone was so pleading that I hesitated, but I felt that I could not bear to face any of them just yet after that disgraceful scene downstairs.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I would rather be alone, Lorna, if you don't mind."

"Maida, please! I want to speak to you. Please, dear!"

Reluctantly, I crossed to the door, and opened it. She came in quickly, closing the door behind her, and spoke without meeting my eyes.

"Maida, I am so very sorry that this has occurred. I want to apologize for mother, for all of us. We had no right to adopt that tone to you, to question you as if you had done something dreadful. And you mustn't mind mother; she never means a word she says when

she gets into one of those tempers of hers. No one ever pays any attention to her."

"And why do they not?" I asked, bitterly. "Why should your mother be permitted to insult people flagrantly, and not be held accountable for it? I am sorry to have to say this, Lorna, but I never have been so hurt, or so disgusted! Perhaps it was imprudent of me to have spoken to that young man without a proper introduction, but it certainly was no worse and under no circumstances would there have been any excuse for your mother's words."

"I know, dear, it was horrid of her, but you must try to understand, and overlook it. You must try to forgive her, Maida, for the sake of our old friendship."

I shook my head.

"She is not the Aunt Julie I used to know. She seems like a different woman, entirely.—And I cannot understand why you should all have questioned my actions as you did! If I owed an explanation to anyone, it was to your mother, most certainly not to any other guest beneath your roof."

Lorna, started, as if to speak, but checked herself suddenly, and I went on:

"Monsieur Pelissier's manner was insufferable. He has been insolent more than once, and forced himself upon me in spite of every effort on my part to show him that he was obnoxious to me. I have avoided an open rupture with him, avoided precipitating a scene

which would have necessitated my cutting him deliberately in the future, because of the situation in which I found myself, as your mother's guest. You must see for yourself, Lorna, how impossible it would be for me to remain here any longer."

"You are thinking of going away?" she flashed a quick look at me. "Ah, my dear, you will not be so foolish, so unkind! Why, where would you go?"

"I have a friend, of whom my father thoroughly approves, with whom I can stay until his return. I am sorry that our friendship of years should end like this, but there is no alternative."

"Maida, you must listen to me!" she began impetuously, and then hesitated, as if choosing her words carefully. "You cannot go, you cannot leave us! You must dismiss that thought from your mind. Mother would never permit it, your father left you in her charge——"

"He did not leave me here to be insulted, heaped with degrading abuse!" I interrupted hotly.

"I know. I am sorry, deeply sorry for my part in it all. I should not have questioned you, but I spoke on the impulse of the moment. Please don't think of ending our friendship in a spirit of anger, dear, after a silly quarrel. You cannot leave us like this."

"The quarrel was not of my making." I returned wearily. "Please don't let us discuss it any longer, it is of no use. I could never be happy here again.



"Maida, I have tried to be your friend, and it is as a friend that I speak to you now." She came to me, putting both hands upon my shoulders, and looking deeply into my stormy eyes. "It is out of the question for you to go. There is something else, too, that I must say to you. I know, of course, that your meeting with that young man was accidental and perfectly innocent, a mere trifling episode, but unless you wish to bring down trouble upon your head—such trouble as you have no conception of—you will not try to speak to, or even see him again. Don't misunderstand me, I am warning you because I like you, because I have learned to care for you all over again! Mother can be very hard, very hateful when she wants to be, and you must realize that until your father comes for you, you are absolutely in her hands."

I turned away from her, feeling helpless and desperate, and cut off from all the world. The thought of the days ahead of me, before I could communicate with Daddy, was unbearable. Miss Farmingdale was my one hope, and I must manage to reach her, somehow.

"I will leave you now," Lorna said gently. "Please think over what I have said, Maida, and try to make the best of things. You will feel differently, I know, when you have collected yourself. We have all been horrid to you, poor child, but we will do everything we can to help you to forget it. Try to put this morning's

scene out of your mind, and we will go on as before. It is the best, the only way."

She kissed me, and went quietly from the room, and I sank down in a chair by the window. I felt more calm, but her words had not shaken my resolution. I must bring myself, if I could, to part with them all, even Mrs. Smith, in an outward appearance of friendliness; it would be childish to leave in a huff, in spite of the treatment which had been accorded me. But leave I should, at the first opportunity which presented itself.

Luncheon was announced, but I refused to go downstairs, and presently Lucie appeared with a tray. I declined it, murmuring something about a severe headache, but she smiled superciliously, and placed the tray on the table. Evidently the quarrel and its cause were no secrets in the servant's quarters. It would be like Mrs. Smith to confide in her maids!

I left the food untouched; I knew that a morsel of it would have choked me. My thoughts turned to Gilbert, and I wondered how he felt when I had not come to the spring that morning as he had asked me to. Surely he must have known that something had happened; but then, of course, he might have thought that I did not wish to come, or that I was afraid of incurring my aunt's displeasure. Suppose he had been near and had overheard something of the quarrel? Mrs. Smith had screamed so loudly, in her rage, that it

seemed to me she must have been heard all over the island. If he thought that his presence had brought trouble to me, he would go away, and I should never see him again, at least not until I escaped from this miserable environment, and Daddy was home once more. And then he might have gone off to the ends of the earth on one of his expeditions, and not return for years and years! Oh, I must manage to elude them, somehow, and see him just once again!"

The afternoon was well advanced, when I heard the sound which I had been dreading; Mrs. Smith's step outside my door. She tapped lightly but insistently, and feeling that I had no choice, I said: "Come in."

"Maida, my dear child," she began as she crossed the room. "I have come to tell you how sorry I am that I lost my temper with you this morning. I would not have been unkind to dear Margaret's baby for anything in the world, but I was beside myself——"

"We will leave my mother out of it, if you please, Mrs. Smith," I said firmly, although my lips trembled. How dared she mention her name after calling me a low-bred hussy!

"Don't say 'Mrs. Smith' in that cold way, dearie, I can't bear it! Call me 'Aunt Julie' just as you did ever since you first learned to talk!" she sniffed and touched her eyes with her handkerchief. "If you knew how deeply I regretted my harshness, you would forgive me, I am sure. I was frantic at the thought that

you might have done something foolish, and your father would hold me accountable. You are only just out of school, you are ignorant of the ways of the world, and of men and their motives, and you might so easily have gotten entangled in some love affair with this person, and then what would your father have said to me? It was wrong of you to speak to him, Maida, I am sure that you will acknowledge that in your heart, but I am to blame for not watching you more closely—I mean, taking better care of you.”

“It was wrong of me to speak to him in the first place, I know,” I said, adding a little confusedly. “That is, it would have been if he wasn’t the—the sort of man he seems to be. He is quite all right, a gentleman——”

“Ah, my dear, the so-called gentlemen are the worst pack of fortune hunters in the world! You can have no idea yet how you will be run after, persecuted by them, as ‘Oil-Well’ Waring’s only child. You don’t realize that you are one of the biggest catches in the country!”

I could have reminded her that her own daughters were in danger from fortune hunters, but I didn’t.

“You forget, this young man has not the slightest idea that I am ‘Oil-Well Waring’s’ daughter. I—I scarcely know him, but I am sure of that.”

“Well, my dear, there has been no harm done, and we will say nothing more about it. I know that you

won't be so imprudent again. Only you will believe that I am very sorry for my rudeness, my unkindness to you this morning, and let me try to make amends for it? Lorna tells me that you suggested leaving us; Maida, you cannot think of it, it would break my heart if this little misunderstanding should end a life-long friendship! I cannot bear to have you discontented and unhappy, and I'm sure you won't be after you have had time to think it over."

"Really, I would rather go away," I protested. "You were very kind to ask me to stay here with you this summer, and I do appreciate it, but I feel now that it would be better if I did not."

"You are still hurt, poor child, and no wonder! Your father would never forgive me if I failed in my trust, and I don't mean to!" she added laughingly. "You can just dismiss the thought of running away from us, dearie, for I wouldn't let you go if I had to lock you up!"

I recoiled from her, and something like terror crept up into my heart. She had spoken with an assumption of playfulness, but beneath the lightness there was an underlying note of purpose.

I believed that she was quite capable of putting her facetious threat into execution!

"You haven't eaten a bit of lunch!" she went on, solicitously. "You must be really faint! I'll send you up some nice hot tea and you must try and rest a little.

Come, let us kiss and make up, and we will forget all about it!"

She came to me, and I suffered her to kiss my cheek, but I could not speak.

When the door closed behind me, I stumbled over to my desk. Miss Farmingdale must come at once and take me away! I would not be kept prisoner here against my will!

I tried to compose myself to write, but my hand trembled so I could scarcely hold the pen, and the words would not take coherent form in my mind. All at once, as I sat struggling with my task, the sound of voices came to me through the open window, from the veranda below. I rose, and looked out. Bijou and Alaric stood there almost directly beneath my window. She looked sullen and peevish, and he seemed to be expostulating with her. I had no conscious intention of listening, but involuntarily I paused, and in a moment she spoke.

"I don't care, it's easy for you to talk, I suppose you're stuck on her, too! It's sickening to have to keep on toadying to that little snob, with her airs and her graces, and etiquette and all that rot about being our guest! Gee! I'll be glad, I can tell you, when it's over, and she's gone! I hate the sight of her, and I'd like to tell her a thing or two! Little sneak! I wish I'd known there was another man on this island!"

Alaric chuckled.

"She saw him first, whoever he is!" he remarked. "And you'd better take a tip from me, and behave yourself, and treat her decently."

"Oh, I've got to I suppose," she returned, with a pout. "But she's here, fast enough, and here she'll stay until she goes to her father. She's no better than we are, after all. 'Oil-Well Waring's' daughter! I don't see why we should submit to her nonsense! If it was up to me, I'd soon show her where she stood!"

I shrank back from the window, covering my ears. What a hateful, hateful girl she was! I knew now where I stood, without her showing me; and I knew where I would stand in a few days, if I had to swim ashore, and make my way alone to Miss Farmingdale. Then a sudden thought flashed across my mind. I wasn't alone, after all. I wasn't quite helpless. There was Gilbert!

## CHAPTER XI.

### *The Opened Letter.*

**K** NOWING that the ordeal of facing them all would grow more formidable the longer I waited, I nerved myself to go down to dinner, even with Bijou's ill-natured words ringing in my ears and capping the climax of the day's unhappiness. Lorna greeted me pleasantly, quite as if nothing at all unusual had occurred, and the rest took their cues from her, so after the first few minutes everything was easier.

Mrs. Smith proposed bridge immediately afterward, but I excused myself and went to my room. I wrote a long letter to Miss Farmingdale, explaining the circumstances as well as I could, and another to Daddy, telling him everything that had occurred, save the fact of Gilbert's identity. I wanted to see his face when I told him that.

I let him know very plainly what I thought of the family, and my plans for putting myself under the pro-



tection of Miss Farmingdale, and I begged him to come home to me as soon as ever he could.

It was long past midnight when I had finished, and the house was dark and still. I took my night light, and going softly downstairs, placed the letters on the hall table. Then I undressed and went to bed, but sleep would not come to me. I lay staring into the darkness, unable to turn my thoughts from the hideously unpleasant position in which I was placed. This was Friday. It would be Monday before my letter would reach Miss Farmingdale, provided someone took it to the mainland the next morning—and Wednesday at least, before she could come for me. There were four or five days more ahead of me on that island, in any event, and I dreaded to think of them. There was a possibility, too, that Miss Farmingdale would decline to interfere, until she heard from Daddy, but I would not let my mind dwell on that.

How long I lay restlessly tossing about, I don't know, but all at once I heard soft footfalls in the hall, and the barest perceptible ray of light crept through the crack between my door and sill, and, traveling across the room, disappeared. Who could be prowling about the house at that hour? I sat up in bed and listened. The person, whoever it was, had descended the stairs. On a sudden impulse I sprang up, drew my dark dressing-gown about my shoulders, and opening

my door noiselessly, inch by inch, I crossed the landing, and peeped down over the balustrade.

A muffled figure, holding a tiny electric candle, stood beside the hall table and as I watched, it moved toward the library door, and vanished.

I waited breathlessly, and saw a strong light spring up, and then the door silently closed.

Who could it have been? I was sure that the figure was that of a woman, not a man.

It seemed to me that an hour or more passed as I stood there clinging to the balustrade, waiting for that figure to reappear. I wanted to satisfy myself, to see who it really was. At length, so suddenly that I drew back in fear lest I should be discovered, the library door opened, and the figure appeared upon the threshold. The lamp in the room behind her had been extinguished, and the sharp white rays from the light she carried, shone full upon her. It was Mrs. Smith, and upon her face was stamped an expression of malignant fury which turned my blood cold.

Shuddering, I fled back to my room, closed the door silently, and crept into bed. For the first time in my life I was afraid! I had never seen such a look upon any human creature before. She had seemed like some ferocious, snarling beast about to spring! I felt that if she had discovered me spying on her, she would have struck me down without mercy. She had looked capable of murder, anything!

What could have happened, and at this hour, to put her in such a fiendish rage? And what had she been doing in that hall, at the table——

Then a swift thought flashed across my mind, and a cold feeling settled about my heart, like the clutch of an icy hand. My letters! She had read my letters!

It was a horrible, low suspicion to harbor, even against her, but it took instant possession of me. I felt that at all costs I must know if it were justified.

The light reappeared under my door, the footsteps passed, and darkness enveloped me again. I lay quaking in every limb, listening for the striking of the tall old clock on the stairs. At length it came: one, two!

I waited until it boomed the half hour, and then, nerving myself desperately against the choking fear which gripped me by the throat, I stepped from my bed, and felt about my table until my fingers closed over the box of matches. I would not dare to strike a light until I reached the hall below, but once there I must be able to ascertain if my letters had been disturbed.

Never shall I be able to forget the horror of that interminable journey down the stairs! I held my breath, in the tense darkness, and clung to the banisters, afraid to put my whole weight on each step lest the stairs creak and betray me.

At last my trembling hand found the newel post, and I crouched there for a time, listening fearfully for the slightest sound from above. The brooding silence was

unbroken and I heaved a sigh of relief. I had reached the foot of the staircase in safety, but the hardest part of my venturesome task lay still before me.

Slowly I crept to the table and felt about noiselessly upon it. The piles of magazines, a humidior, the base of a lamp, and a book or two met my groping fingers, but no envelopes. I must have a light!

Thanking fortune that the box I carried contained parlor matches, and I need not use the raspy sand-paper scratcher, I took one out, and drew it quickly across the smooth felt table-top. It spluttered and flared into flame, and I glanced eagerly down. The letters were gone!

I blew the match out quickly, and stood there, thinking. Dare I venture into the library and search there for them? If I were discovered, I could say that I came down for a book to read, being seepless. I decided to chance it.

After listening carefully again, I stole to the library, closed the door softly behind me, and lighted the lamp. Of course the letters might have been slipped between the pages of one of the books, and in that case an attempt to find them would be futile, for the walls were lined with bookcases and it would have taken days to go through them all. The desk was littered with papers, and I felt mean and prying as I examined them. It was needless, however. The letters were not there, nor anywhere else in the library that I could discover,

although I searched long and thoroughly. There was a locked drawer in the desk, and two in the big center table and I could find no keys to fit them, so at length I gave it up in despair. The letters must be in one of those drawers, or Mrs. Smith had taken them to her room with her.

I extinguished the lamp, and groped my way to the stairs, startled to find that a faint gray light was creeping in at the windows. As I ascended, the tall clock struck four, and I paused aghast. I had been an hour and a half in my fruitless search!

It was not until I had regained the refuge of my own room, with the door safely locked behind me, that I breathed freely once more. There was just one alternative still to consider, from the suspicion that had now almost become a certainty. Mrs. Smith might have descended to the library for some other purpose, and seeing the letters lying there upon the hall table, had placed them in some receptacle for the mail. I determined that in the morning I would make a last, bold effort to discover the truth.

Feeling that sleep would never come to me again, I threw myself on the bed, but I must have been worn out with excitement and the various emotions of the day, for I drifted off into unconsciousness at once.

A low, insistent knocking upon the door awakened me, and I stumbled drowsily across the room and turned the key.

Lorna stood there, with a breakfast tray in her hands. She seemed pale and troubled, as if she had not slept well, either, and she looked anxiously at me.

"Good morning, Maida!" she said, with a tired smile. "I've brought your coffee to you, myself. I was afraid you were ill."

"Ill!" I echoed. "No, but I must have overslept. Is it very late?"

"After ten o'clock." She placed the tray on a stand beside the bed.

"Thank you for bringing my coffee, Lorna. It's so comfy to have it in bed! I'll dress as soon as I've finished it. Do sit down, won't you?"

I plumped the pillows up behind me, and turned to the tray, as she seated herself on the side of the bed. I felt that she was looking at me curiously, and the idea came into my mind that she, too, might have read my letters, and know that I was still resolved to go away, but I put the thought from me as unworthy.

Then a swift thought drove everything else from me. If anyone had already gone to the mainland, presumably with the mail, my last effort to regain the letters would be of no avail.

"Where is Alaric?" I asked guilelessly, as I raised the steaming cup to my lips. "He said something about tennis——"

"He's playing now, with Raoul," she replied, quickly, and I sighed in relief. It was not too late.

A half-hour later we descended the stairs together, and encountered Mrs. Smith coming in from the veranda. She kissed me as affectionately as if she had not called me horrible names only the day before, and as I glanced at her smiling face, I could scarcely believe that the episode of the previous night had not been a dream.

"Will anyone be going over to the mainland today?" I asked. I could not bring myself to add "Aunt Julie."

"Alaric is going, directly after lunch, with the mail," she said. "He would have gone this morning, but I discovered at the last moment that I had forgotten to write a most important letter, so it was necessary for him to wait."

"I'm glad he did!" I said laughingly. "I, too, forgot something very important—a postscript which I want to add to each of my letters. Will you please ask the parlor-maid, or whoever takes the mail from the hall table, and puts it away to be posted, to give them to me? There were two; one was addressed to Daddy, and the other to Miss Farmingdale."

I spoke innocently enough, but I looked straight at her and I saw her affable smile fade.

"Why, yes, certainly, dear," she returned, with obvious hesitation. "I will get them for you at once."

"Two postscripts!" Lorna laughed, but it seemed to me that her voice didn't ring true. "That's an awful habit, Maida!"

"Oh, it isn't a habit with me, I assure you!" I smiled too. "This is really an exceptional case."

She glanced at me quickly, but made no reply, and we joined Bijou, who was sitting under the big umbrella on the lawn, watching the tennis.

"My, you were lazy!" she remarked to me. "Didn't you sleep well?"

"Oh, yes, very!" I returned. "But I didn't go to bed until late. I had some letters to write."

"It's warm, isn't it?" Lorna picked up Alaric's hat, and fanned herself with it. "There isn't a sign of a breeze."

"Yes I'm simply baking!" said Bijou, adding suddenly, with a sly smile. "I saw your friend this morning, Maida; the young man with the dog. He's quite good looking, isn't he?—I mean the young man, of course!" she giggled.

"I don't know, I'm sure. I haven't noticed," I replied stiffly.

"Well, I did! He was in bathing, and he looked so cool, and he was having such a good time fooling with the dog, that I really envied him."

"Suppose we go into the surf," suggested Lorna, hurriedly. "Would you like it, Maida? I have an extra suit you might wear."

"Oh, what's the use? It's such a bother!" Bijou yawned.

I shook my head.



"I'm waiting to add those postscripts to my letters," I said decisively. "I had better return to the house. Your mother may be looking for me."

"Oh, she'll bring them out here to you. It's too hot to move around much this morning," Lorna assured me.

But Mrs. Smith did not appear, and when the set was finished and Alaric and the Frenchman came toward us, I started for the house.

At the door I glanced back. They were all standing in a little group watching me.

Mrs. Smith came along down the stairs as I entered. She held the letters in her hand, and relinquished them to me with evident and visible reluctance.

"You haven't changed your mind?" she tried to laugh lightly. "It's bad luck to reopen a letter, you know!"

I looked straight into her eyes as my fingers closed over the envelopes.

"Perhaps it is," I returned significantly. "It would be curious if it came true, wouldn't it?" And I turned without waiting for a reply, and went up to my room.

There was no need for me to look at the envelopes; the first touch had told me the truth. They were sticky and a little damp and warm. She had evidently re-sealed them hastily, not many minutes before, and tried to dry the paste over a lamp.

I locked my door carefully, and examined them. The

flaps had been skilfully closed, and perhaps I should have noticed nothing amiss had I not been suspicious, but upon one of them was the merest shadow of a smudge of smoke from the lamp, and on the other a tiny smear of scarcely-dried mucilage. I tore them open hastily. The contents were seemingly untouched, just as when I had folded the pages and slipped them into the envelopes.

I sat down and tried desperately to collect my thoughts. Neither of those letters would ever have reached their destination, that was plain. They would have been destroyed, or possibly retained to use against me in some way. How that could be accomplished I hadn't the vaguest idea, but I believed Mrs. Smith to be capable of anything, and some of the opinions I had expressed in confidence to Daddy were libelous to a degree, since I was unable to substantiate them. However, I had at least one cause for satisfaction, petty though it was. They knew, without any palliation now, exactly what I thought of them all!

But what was I to do now? The letters were again in my possession, and I did not mean that they should fall for a second time into Mrs. Smith's hands, that was certain. I knew the real reason why she would not let me go away, of course. She relied greatly on Daddy's friendship and advice, possibly his financial backing as well, and she could not endure the idea of a break with him. She had put me down for a silly,

weak, scatter-brained thing like Bijou, and thought she could win me over so that my resentment against her would die out, and the episode be forgotten. She would probably attempt to exact a promise from me, later on, to say nothing to Daddy about the affair. I smiled to myself. She wasn't a very good judge of character for all her shrewdness!

Anyway, I knew very well that I would not be permitted to go to the mainland myself, and thus gain an opportunity to post the letters. They fancied me secure from all outside aid, but although I was convinced they would watch me closely, I did not think that they took Gilbert into serious consideration. I must reach him, in spite of them, if I had to steal out and go to his bungalow in the middle of the night!

I would not ask him to post the letters for me; I could not risk the chance now of Miss Farmingdale refusing to interfere. Instead, I would tell him who I was, and beg him to take me to her!

I tore both letters into tiny pieces, and burned them in the saucer on my breakfast tray. They would suspect that something was wrong, of course, if I didn't go down stairs again almost at once, and I turned reluctantly to the door.

As I passed my dressing-table, I glanced inadvertently into the mirror, and stopped aghast. I was terribly pale, and there were dark circles about my eyes. It would never do to appear before them like

that, I must manage to compose myself, to drive that white, strained look from my face——

At that moment there came a low tapping at my door, and Lorna's voice called:

"Maida, are your letters ready? Alaric isn't going to wait until afternoon, he wants to start now for the mainland."

I pinched some color into my cheeks, and crossing the room quickly, unlocked the door.

"I have decided not to send those letters, Lorna," I said, slowly. "Please tell Alaric that I shall not trouble him."

She sniffed the odor of burnt paper in the air, and her eyes fell upon the charred bits in the saucer. Then they travelled to mine in a revealing flash, and for a moment we stared at each other in mutual comprehension, with all pretense gone between us.

For a moment, only. Then her eyelids drooped like a mask, and she said quietly,

"Very well, Maida. I will tell him."

She lingered, however, hesitating, and then finally came into the room, and shut the door behind her.

"Maida," she said very softly, almost as if she were afraid of being overheard, "Will you try to believe that I want to be your friend, in spite of appearances? I want to help you, to keep you from being made unhappy. Please don't misunderstand me. No one knows better than I do how hateful my people are, but I am

not like them; you must have seen that. You are foolish and a little bit rash, dear. Don't goad mother too far. You don't understand, and I cannot explain the circumstances, but just now your father's friendship is vital to her, and she would prevent you at any cost from causing it to cease. I told you that she would not allow you to go away from us, you know; I warned you yesterday. Please, please be guided by me, Maida, ah! believe me it is for the best!"

She seemed terribly in earnest as she paused, eyeing me anxiously. Since I had resolved, in any case, to persuade Gilbert to take me away at the first opportunity, it wouldn't make any difference in my plans if I made a pretense of accepting her advice, and I was curious as to what she would suggest.

"I don't understand," I returned, quite frankly. "I know what you refer to, of course, I am not quite such a stupid person as your mother takes me to be, but what is it that you wish me to do?"

She came to me, and laid her hand persuasively upon my arm.

"Sit down at your desk, quickly, and write two little notes, to your father and Miss Farmingdale; just short pleasant letters, telling them that you are well and happy, and having a nice time. Don't—don't add anything about the trouble yesterday, or a word that—that mother could object to. You know what I mean. You have only a few minutes."

I walked slowly over to the desk, and seating myself, picked up a pen. After all, there didn't seem to be any reason why I should not comply with her request. If the letters were actually mailed, I could explain everything to Miss Farmingdale when I reached her, and cable the whole story to Daddy.

I drew a sheet of paper toward me, and had hastily scribbled a few words, when a quick revulsion of feeling came. Some blind instinct, some mysterious sixth sense, warned me not to go on. I had gotten into one difficulty already over my letters, and I would not burden myself with further deception.

"Hurry, dear!" Alaric is waiting, you know," Lorna reminded me, and her voice sounded curiously tense in my ears.

I rose and tore the sheet of paper across.

"No!" I cried. "I will not write a lie! I am not happy, I am having a perfectly horrible time, as you well know, and if I may not tell Daddy the truth, I shall not tell him a thing!"

"I'm afraid you will be very sorry that you have taken this stand," Lorna said slowly. "Oh, Maida, can't you understand that I'm trying to help you? Won't you believe that I know what is best, and do as I ask?"

"I'm sorry," I replied. "I am sure you mean it kindly, but I will not do what I know to be wrong. I have never deceived Daddy in my life, and I'm not

going to begin now, to please your mother or anybody else."

"But what will you say to her, to my mother, if she asks you about the letters?"

"The truth. That I have destroyed them. And if she inquires further into what is strictly my own affair, I shall tell her that I will write no more, as I think their chance of reaching the post unmolested is very slight!"

"Ah, my dear, you will not be so very foolish as to precipitate another quarrel! It was for your own sake that I suggested it, to avoid any open rupture with her, that the remainder of your stay with us might be outwardly serene and pleasant, but I see that you will not be convinced."

"No, Lorna," I said with finality. "I really cannot. Please give Alaric my message. Or, wait, I will go myself."

"Please don't! I'll tell him." She gave me a last, long appealing look, and then, with a shrug of her shoulders, as though she washed her hands of the whole matter, she left the room.

I did not descend until I heard the chug-chug of the departing launch, and then joined the others quite prepared for another scene, if necessary, although I shrank indescribably from it.

But there was no scene. No reference was made to my letters and Mrs. Smith was as affable and un-

ruffled as if she did not very well know that her deception had been discovered.

For the rest of the day they watched me sedulously, although they tried to prevent their espionage from being too obvious. I could not leave the veranda without one or another of them trailing me on some pretext, and I gave it up at last. It was only too evident that if I meant to find Gilbert, I must make the attempt at some hour when they would think me safe in bed.

As I sat by my window late that afternoon, I heard the faint, sweet, rhythmic tolling of a bell. Church bells again, and on Saturday afternoon! Surely there could not be another funeral, in that little village over on the mainland. It must be a Seventh Day Adventist Church, as Lorna had suggested half-jokingly, or some other sect which kept the old Sabbath holy.

Had only a week passed since we had heard them before, as Lorna and I had sat talking in her favorite nook? It seemed ages ago.

When I descended, a little later, I met Mrs. Macpherson, the housekeeper, on the stairs. I stopped on an idle impulse, and spoke of the bells.

I fancied she looked at me oddly, as she replied.

"Yes, I heard them, Miss Waring."

"Isn't it queer, on Saturday, too? I heard them last week, at the same hour. Do you suppose it's another funeral?"

"Happen, it is. There's one dies every minute,



somewhere in the world, 'tis said. I wouldna trouble my head about it, if I were you," she smiled a little, but her manner seemed hesitant. "Dinner's been announced."

I went down the stairs, feeling that she was rather a queer character. She was perfect in her place, the domestic arrangements of the house moved like clock-work, but there was something about her which I did not understand.

It was late that evening, after we had finished a final rubber of bridge and were still seated idly about the table, that the greatest shock of all came to me, and, as before, it was Alaric who precipitated it.

"What do you think?" he remarked, looking suddenly across at me. "That fellow has gone; the man in afternoon, bag and baggage and the dog. He had a pile of trunks and suitcases, too, enough to stay all summer. Must have changed his mind very suddenly, eh?"

Gone! Gilbert was gone, and with him, my last hope of escape.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *The Truth.*

**L**ONG after the house had settled to silence, I paced my room in a perfect frenzy of despair. Gilbert had broken his word! He had said that he would stay as long as I needed him, that he would be at my service always, and I had felt instinctively, from his tone, that he had really meant it; it was no mere formal figure of speech. Worse than anything else, he might have thought me just a silly, horrid little flirt! The Smiths had been only too ready to put that construction upon my talks with him. I had refused to ask him to call, or permit him to make himself known to Alaric and the others.

Of course, he could not have the faintest idea that his being who he was, made all the difference in the world. But why had he jumped to such a hasty conclusion, and gone without even trying to see me again? Oh, if he had only waited!

Then a swift burning thought came, like a sharp stab of pain. Perhaps he hadn't meant what he said! I knew that men didn't always. Perhaps he had only been amusing himself, and the mild sport palling upon him, had gone back to the stalking of bigger game!

What I should do now I didn't know, and I didn't even try to think. My own predicament had faded into insignificance beside the overwhelming knowledge that he had failed me. He had gone forever, without a word or sign. He hadn't cared!

The moon, which on the previous night had been wholly obscured by the clouds, rose slowly now, and sailed in silvery splendor high up over the trees, and I sank down in the low chair by the window, with my head upon the sill, and sobbed my heart out. I felt as if it didn't matter to me, then, if I never left that awful island!

Men were horrible, deceitful, trifling creatures, and Gilbert Spear wasn't any different from the rest! Laddie had been infinitely more trustworthy than his master; he, at least, was faithful——

Then, as I crouched, sobbing, all at once through the eerie stillness, a sound, faint and far away, broke upon my ears. It was probably the most unmusical, drearily monotonous plaint conceivable, but no celestial chorus could have flooded my heart with greater rapture and peace. It was a dog, howling at the moon.

"Oh, Laddie!" I cried softly, stretching out my

arms into the luminous darkness. "Laddie! Your master has not gone!"

Alaric had lied, lied! Gilbert was there, as he had promised, waiting until my need should bring me to him! He had meant all that he had said, and he would help me out of this unbearable situation! I had accused him in my own mind of being unworthy of confidence, when I had been only too ready to believe the first thing which was said about him, by people whom I had good reason to know were treacherous to a degree.

The blessed reassurance of Laddie's lugubrious wail brought me strength and courage to face what still lay before me, and I resolved that with the coming of the dawn I would steal away and find Gilbert, tell him everything without reservation, and place myself under his protection.

My eyelids grew heavier and heavier, and finally I drifted off to sleep, there by the window, with my head pillowed upon my arm. My dreams were troubled ones and I awakened from them with an apprehensive start, feeling that I must have slept a long while. A faint grayish haze had suffused the darkness, and there was a rosy glow in the east.

As I rubbed my eyes, and stretched my cramped arms, I heard the hall clock on the landing strike five. I had no time to lose! I was still in the dinner gown which I had worn the evening before, but I changed

quickly to a dark serviceable linen, and replaced my satin slippers with stout pumps. Then I opened my door softly, and tiptoed out upon the landing.

At the head of the stairs I paused and looked down, and as my eyes pierced the gloom, my heart almost stopped beating. There, in a great chair by the door, sat Monsieur Pelissier! He had changed from his evening clothes into immaculate flannels and he sat quite motionless, as I stood gazing down upon him. I wondered why he did not speak, but gradually my eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, and I perceived that he was sound asleep.

I shrank back quickly, lest he should wake and discover me. I knew that I could not hope to steal past his chair and unbolt the heavy door without arousing him, but there must be a servant's stairway somewhere at the back, if I could find it.

With my breath coming fast, and a queer, choking sensation in my throat, I made my way noiselessly down the hall, step by step, toward the wing in the rear, over the kitchen. At a sudden turning, I came upon the stairs which I was seeking—and upon something else for which I had not been prepared. It was Alaric, fast asleep, like Monsieur Pelissier, but snoring stertorously, and there was a strong odor of spirits on the air. He was a very unpleasant spectacle, as he lay back in his chair, with his outstretched legs completely blocking the narrow passage, his collar un-

fastened, and his mouth wide open. On a small stand beside him was a tray containing a plate of half-eaten sandwiches, a decanter and glass and a cigarette box. The decanter and box were both empty; evidently the means he had taken to while away the tedium of his hours on guard had served to make him relax his vigilance.

But to pass him was out of the question, and there was nothing for it but to return to my room, with tears of helpless anger in my eyes. I seemed to be a prisoner, in very truth! Was there no way in which I could elude them, and get out of the house? Must I own myself defeated?

As I looked from my window, I saw that the red was deepening in the east. The birds were already astir, and soon the sun would rise. What could I do?

All at once, a desperate inspiration came to me. The tree! The great tree, whose stout limb upon which the robin had nested, almost touched my window! I hadn't climbed a tree since I was a tiny girl, back in Texas, but my work in the gymnasium at school had kept me strong and supple, and quick as a cat. It was hazardous, but there was no other way.

I opened my window as wide as it would go, and climbing up, knelt upon the sill. The ground looked very, very far beneath me, and there was a queer sinking feeling about my heart, but I nerved myself, and reached out to the limb.

How I did it I don't know to this day. I was faint and dizzy, and dared not look down again, but I drew myself inch by inch out upon the sturdy branch. I shuddered when my foot left the sill, and the trunk of the tree seemed an appalling distance away but I kept straight on, worming my way slowly forward. I tried to avoid the robin's nest, but my knee dislodged it, and at the piercing outcry of the startled birds I held my breath in swift panic, but there was no sound from the house.

At last, after perilous, interminable minutes I reached the tree-trunk, and clasped it with a little sob of relief, feeling that the worst was over. The branches grew out thickly on every side, and the descent would be very easy. I started down like a monkey, swinging from my arms until my groping feet found hold, and was just beginning to breathe freely, when disaster came.

Too recklessly, I had stepped out upon the rotting stub of a dead branch, and it snapped beneath my weight, sending me crashing down upon the ground. I lay there for a moment, dazed and shaken, but my desperate need goaded me to action, and I struggled to my feet and stood swaying, fighting back the faintness which threatened to overcome me.

The noise of my fall had reverberated hideously in my own ears. What if it had awakened those in the house? I must not wait to find out, it was too late to

do anything but go forward, and every instant was precious.

I stumbled through the shrubbery until I reached the woods, and then started running as hard as I could toward the bungalow. I did not know what I should do when I got there. I only knew that I must find Gilbert as quickly as I could, if I had to scream and beat upon the door.

But just before I reached the little clearing in which the bungalow stood, I heard Laddie bark, and a great splashing noise, and the echo of Gilbert's ringing laugh, and I swerved, springing toward the beach.

As I emerged from the undergrowth upon the sand, Gilbert and Laddie were only a few feet away, and both of them stared a moment in surprise at my sudden apparition.

With my arms outflung in a frenzy of appeal I rushed forward.

"Oh, Gilbert! Gilbert!" I cried.

He gave one glance at my pale, frightened face and sprang toward me.

His arms closed about my trembling body, and I clung to him, sobbing breathlessly.

"What is it?" he asked. "What has happened, little girl? And where have you been hiding yourself these two days?"

"Oh," I gasped incoherently. "Gilbert, you must help me to get away from them! They treat me like a



prisoner here! They threatened to lock me up because they found out I had been talking to you, and then Alaric said you had gone away, and I was so unhappy until I heard Laddie howling in the night. Oh, you will take care of me?" His arms tightened about me, and as if I were dreaming, I heard his voice, saying softly:

"Always, Lucy, if you will let me. I want to take care of you always!"

And then he kissed me. A sudden trembling seized me, but it wasn't of fear, and my heart fluttered, as if a little bird nestled there, and all at once began to sing.

"Gilbert!" I whispered, "Dear Gilbert!"

Suddenly there came a rustling in the undergrowth back of me, and in a flash, a sharp realization of what I had left behind me swept over my mind.

"Take me somewhere, quickly!" I begged. "There is something I must tell you! Take me where we could not be seen by anyone following me from the house!"

I drew myself slowly from his arms, and as I did so, he uttered a low exclamation of horror.

"My God, Lucy! You are hurt!"

My sleeve was torn and soaked with blood, and I became conscious, as my eyes fell upon it, that my arm burned as though it had been seared with a hot iron.

"It's nothing!" I gasped hurriedly. "I must have scraped my arm against the tree, when I fell."

"Tree? What do you mean, dear?"

"They were guarding both stairways, so that I could not slip away from the house and come to you, and I climbed out of my window, and down a tree, and a branch broke——"

"Good heavens! What does it all mean? Why does your aunt treat you so?——But come, we won't talk here——"

He took my hand and like two children we raced along the hard sand, past the Barford bungalow, to a pile of gray rocks which jutted out like a promontory into the water. A rough seat had been chiselled out of the solid stone in a tiny, cave-like shelter, and I dropped panting upon it, while Gilbert stood anxiously over me, fanning me with his hat.

When I managed to breathe again, he seated himself beside me, and took my hands in his.

"Lucy, dear, I don't know what this trouble is which you are in, but it must end. I am going up to-day to see your aunt!"

"You cannot!" I cried. "Gilbert you don't know. I'm trying to tell you——"

"I must," he returned, doggedly. "I have gotten you into serious difficulties already, by meeting you in this way, and I am going to tell her that I love you, that I want you for my wife, dear. You said that she was your guardian, while your father was away."

Anxious as I was to tell him everything, I yielded to a swift, mischievous impulse.

"Are you sure?" I whispered, with a little smile. "Isn't there another girl that you—you might have married?"

"What girl?" he cried in surprise.

"Oh, someone your father might want you to marry; Maida Waring, for instance."

"Maida Waring!" he repeated, blankly. "How on earth did you ever happen to hear that my father—Good Lord! The papers haven't got hold of that, have they?"

"Not that I am aware of," I returned demurely.

"I've never seen her in my life!" he protested, adding quite suddenly. "Nor am I likely to, now, poor girl!"

"Why not?" I asked, in genuine surprise.

"Don't you know? For Heaven's sake don't your people read the newspapers? They've fairly reeked with it for a week or more! She's been kidnapped!"

For an instant everything whirled and went black before my eyes, and it seemed as if an icy wave crept up from my feet and engulfed me! Then, far away, I heard Gilbert's voice, as he continued, all unsuspecting.

"She was stolen, in broad daylight, from under the very nose of her school principal, by an imposter, who passed herself off as an old family friend. The fraud wasn't discovered until several hours later, when the real friend came at the appointed time to take the girl away. She's disappeared as if the ground had opened

and swallowed her. Her father and mine, who is his best friend, have been moving heaven and earth to find her, but there isn't a clue, although the police of the whole country are searching for her, and every detective in the business is on the job. The government is helping out with revenue cutters, keeping strict watch of the ports; her father is a power in the world of finance, you know. The gang that have her in their possession demand a cool million dollars reward, and Oil-Well Waring would pay it like a shot, but the police have cautioned him against it."

"Then Daddy isn't in Europe!" I cried. It was the only fact I seemed to be able to grasp. "Thank God! Thank God!"

"What are you saying, dear?" Gilbert asked, looking at me in a bewildered fashion. "Who is 'Daddy'?"

"My father! You call him 'Oil-Well'!" I sobbed hysterically. "Oh, Gilbert, take me to him! I—I am Maida Waring!"

"Good God!" He sprang to his feet, and stood staring down at me as if he had suddenly taken leave of his senses. "You? Why you are Lucy Smith! You can't know what you are talking about!"

"When you heard that woman who said she was my Aunt Julie calling 'Lucie,' she was summoning her maid. You thought I was 'Miss Smith' and I didn't correct you, because you had allowed me to believe you were young Mr. Barford, and I wanted to turn the

tables on you. Oh, you must understand, you must believe me, and take me away!" Then as he did not speak, I added, on a swift inspiration. "You've seen Daddy, of course? You know him?"

He nodded, dumbly, and I drew out my precious locket, and snapped it open. There, smiling up at me, was Daddy's dear face, and opposite the inscription.

Gilbert's eyes traveled slowly from it to my face.

"Maida!" he whispered. "You are Maida Waring! That I should have found you, and here!"

"You are sure Gilbert, that it's true?" I gasped. "It isn't some horrible, ghastly joke? These people aren't really the Smiths, after all?"

"Of course they're not! The real Smiths are joining heart and soul in the search for you! Here!" he reached in his hip pocket and drew out a folded wad of newspaper. "I thought I wrapped Laddie's biscuits in the front page of Saturday's *Mercury*. Look at this!"

The biscuits tumbled to the rocks at his feet, and he smoothed out the crumpled half-sheet upon my knee. My own name stared up at me in letters four inches high, spread out all across the page, and I read: "Maida Waring Still Missing. Police Baffled. No Clue Yet To Abductors." And beneath, in smaller letters the opening paragraph met my eyes.

"The mysterious kidnapping of Maida Waring, only child of the noted financial magnate Larry 'Oil-Well' Waring remains unsolved. No similar crime, since the

famous Charley Ross case, has aroused such widespread interest. Practically the entire country is aiding in the search, but thus far there has not developed a single clue, and the belief is growing, in some quarters, that the beautiful young woman will never be found. The abductors, who on Wednesday communicated with Mr. Waring, demanding one million dollars as the sum of his daughter's ransom, have been unprecedentedly bold in their operations, and it appears inconceivable that the police——"

Here the paper had been torn away, but the fragment which I had read struck home to my understanding, and as the paper fluttered to the ground, I raised my eyes to Gilbert, and for a moment we stared speechlessly at each other.

"Maida!" he said at last, and his voice lingered caressingly upon the name. "If only you had trusted me, and told me before, dear! But it's not too late, thank God! Now listen carefully, dear! We haven't a moment to lose! I'll go now and get the launch and bring her around here. You must be ready to jump in as soon as I touch at this rock, and then lie flat down in the bottom, and don't move or cry out, no matter what happens. Thank Heaven and Barford she's a fast little craft with a racing engine in her! We'll make for Kittery, for our lives!"

"Kittery!" I cried. "Oh, Gilbert, that's away off in Maine, isn't it?"

"Where do you think we are now?" he asked, grimly.

"Why on Sunset Island, in Buzzard's Bay——" the words died in my throat as I looked at him.

"We're on Hog-back Island, off the coast of Maine."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "Why it only took us overnight to get here on the yacht from New York!"

"Well, dear, we'll talk about all that later. Now, it's a matter of life and death with us. If they suspect for a moment that I knew who you were, they would shoot me down like a dog, and your chance of escape would be gone! They're too desperate to stop at half-measures. Wait here for me very quietly, dear, and don't show yourself until you hear the launch. I won't be five minutes."

He took me in his arms, kissed me again, impulsively, and was gone, and I sank back into my seat as if stunned. There must be some hideous mistake! We could not have reached an island off the coast of Maine in a bare twenty-four hours from New York! Then my eyes fell upon the scrap of newspaper lying at my feet, and as I stopped and picked it up abstractedly, the date caught my eye. Saturday, the twelfth. How could a New York paper of yesterday have reached here in time for Gilbert to have purchased it on the mainland the very afternoon of the day on which it was printed? Then a swift thought startled me afresh. The bells! The church bells, which I had heard the

week before! It must have been Sunday, not Saturday, as I supposed. How could I have lost a day in my reckoning? I went over in my mind all that had occurred from the moment of my departure from Miss Farmingdale's, and as the events of that evening on the *Tortoise* returned to me, I suddenly remembered that queer, heavy punch Monsieur Pelissier had brewed, how sleepy I had grown immediately after drinking it, and how dull and congested and headachy I had felt when I awakened, and weak with hunger, as though I had slept a very long time. The conviction came to me that I had been drugged and instead of awakening the next morning, had been unconscious for another twenty-four hours!

I knew too that my locket chain had not broken; it had been tampered with. I recalled Lorna's probing for a schoolgirl love affair; possibly they planned to obtain money from my lover, too, if I had one. They couldn't open my locket, of course, and feared to betray themselves so early by breaking it.

All sorts of significant facts came trooping back to my mind, and in a growing horror I tried to shut them out. I felt as if I should go mad if I thought any more. The knowledge of the truth had been so crushing, so overwhelming, that my dazed brain refused to grasp the mass of corroborative detail which returned to torture me.

I folded the fragment of newspaper and stuck it in



my blouse, crouching low under the rock in an increasing agony of terror. Suppose these fiends came before Gilbert could get back, and found me there! What would they do to me, for having defied them and run away? Would they kill me, or imprison me there, or take me to some far off place where Daddy and Gilbert could never find me again? Each moment that passed brought an increasing realization of the horror of my position, and the actual peril in which I stood. Gilbert had been gone for ages! Could anything have happened to him? Oh, why did he not come!

I strained my ears, but no sound of any approaching launch could be heard, only the lapping of the little waves upon the rocks, and the birds' songs, in the woods behind me. Then all at once there came, not the chug-chug of the motorboat, but a quick light patter of feet, as of someone running over the sand toward me. I shrank back, trembling, against the stone, looking wildly about me for some way of escape, but there was none, save the open sea. The steps came nearer, someone scrambled over the rocks, and I opened my lips to scream, when Gilbert's voice sounded in my ears.

"It's I, Maida! Don't be frightened!"

I sobbed aloud in my relief, but one glance at his pale, troubled face sent a chill to my heart.

"Oh, Gilbert, what is it?" I whispered.

"I'm sorry, dear. Try to be brave, I'll manage to

get you off this island somehow, but they've cut off our chance of escape in the launch."

"How could they?" I gasped. "It was there, tied to the dock, just a few minutes ago! I saw it as we ran past."

"Yes, but they've put the engine out of commission. They must have done it last night, for it was running like a breeze yesterday afternoon."

"But surely you can fix it?" Despair was settling down closer and closer upon me.

Gilbert shook his head.

"No, dear, they made sure of that. They have smashed it to atoms, and haven't made the least effort to disguise the fact. It looks as if they did it with a sledge hammer! They evidently towed it out to sea quite a distance, so that I would not hear the noise, for it has obviously been moved, and retied to the dock with a different knot from the hitch I always make. They weren't taking any chances on our giving them the slip, you see. We're both prisoners now, Maida!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *The Storm Breaks.*

**T**HE full horror of it swept over me, at that moment. We were lost! Gilbert was powerless to help me, and these terrible creatures had us both firmly in their clutches!

"There is nothing to be done, then," I said slowly. "Only—I—I am sorry that I've dragged you into this; that I've brought such trouble upon you——"

"There's a great deal to be done!" he interrupted me. "You will be quite safe in a few hours, I promise you, if you will keep your nerve, and do just what I say. I know you're not a coward, Maida darling, but you must summon all your courage, for the worst of this terrible experience is before you. I cannot hide you anywhere on the island, even in the bungalow, for they would break in and search every nook and corner. I—I would die for you, dear, you know that, but I can do nothing against so many. Their gardeners and menservants are undoubtedly in their pay in this

scheme, and if they kill me, your only chance of escape from the island would be gone."

"The lighthouse!" I cried. "Couldn't you hide me there?"

He shook his head.

"I had thought of that. But they would be sure to look there first of all. Now, Maida, I don't want to alarm you, but we have only a few minutes left together. You were followed from the house. I caught a glimpse of that Frenchman, far up the sands, as I turned away from the disabled launch. He will see our footprints on the beach, and undoubtedly follow us here. Listen, dear, and try to understand and obey me, for your very life may depend upon it. I want you to leave me here and strike out through the woods straight across the island and back to the house by the other path."

"The house!" I exclaimed. "Oh, Gilbert, surely you don't mean for me to go back to them, to walk into that trap again?"

"You must do more than that," he returned, earnestly. "You must pretend cordiality, friendliness, utterly disarm any fears they may entertain. If they should suspect for a moment that you know the truth, they would lock you up and put a strong guard about you, be sure of that. It is the only way, dear, you have got to steel yourself to meet them as if nothing had happened. Late tonight, when they've all retired and

the house is quiet, I'll come and take you away in their racing motor boat—but first I'll treat their launch as they treated mine, so that there will be no fear of pursuit."

"But how will I get out of the house?" I asked, trembling. "I could never climb down that tree in the dark!"

"There's a long ladder at the end of their kitchen garden. I've noticed it more than once. I'll get you down safely on it, Maida dear. Which is your window?"

I described it as well as I could, and he nodded reassuringly. Then his face changed, and he peered cautiously from behind the barrier of rock.

"He's coming!" his tones were tense and very low, and he added as I started in swift terror. "Don't be frightened, Maida. He's not near yet, and walking very slowly, watching our tracks, as I surmised he would. You've time enough to get away before he reaches us. My poor darling!" Gilbert drew me to my feet, and held me close. "I wish there were some other way, but there isn't. Try to be your own brave self, and meet them on their own ground. They have deceived you for ten days, now try with all your might to outwit them for as many hours. Promise me that you won't lose courage, dear, and that you will try!"

"I promise, Gilbert!" I whispered, with my eyes on his.

"I cannot bear to let you go, to send you back, straight into their clutches once more, but I must!" he said quickly. "Good-bye, dearest. Don't lose heart. Only trust me, have faith in me, and know that I will save you!"

For a moment longer I clung to him, and then, shuddering, turned blindly away and stumbled off over the rocks. I dared not glance over my shoulder at him; I knew that if I did, I should rush back and fling myself hysterically into his arms, and Monsieur Pelissier would come upon us, and our last chance would be gone. Gilbert was right, of course. There was no other way, and yet every instinct within me revolted at going back, and presenting myself again before them, a smiling docile dupe!

I reached the shelter of the woods, and pushed through the undergrowth in what I knew to be the general direction of the path. I prayed that I might be able to get safely through that fearful day, and that the night would come quickly, bringing Gilbert, and release from this hideous captivity.

All at once I became conscious of a faint rustling behind me, which drew unmistakably nearer, and then the tramp of feet. Monsieur Pelissier was almost upon me! My first impulse was to rush on wildly, but I quickly realized the futility of it, and the suspicion it would draw down upon me, so I decided to await his coming deliberately. A huge old tree, a victim, doubt-

less, of the previous week's storm, lay prone athwart my path, and I seated myself upon it. My arm was stinging and throbbing, and the dull, insistent ache in my shoulder warned me that it was badly wrenched. Whether it was the pain or merely the reaction from the nervous strain of the mystery which I had instinctively felt surrounded me for so many days, I could not have told, but from being terror-stricken and tremulously fainthearted, my mood changed swiftly to one of courageous aggression. Now that the first shock of the astounding revelation which had come to me was past, I found myself growing more and more furious at the deception of which I had been so easy a victim.

Instead of dreading the approach of the Frenchman, I was almost anxious for the meeting, ready to encounter his suspicions, and pit my wits against his. I would keep my promise to Gilbert, I had no fear of failure now! I would play with them as they had played with me! I would show them that the simple little schoolgirl they had decoyed into the net so smoothly spread for her, was not quite such a gullible fool as they had imagined.

I cradled my hurt arm with the other, and smiled blandly as Monsieur Pelissier parted the sumac bushes and sprang into view. He halted, at finding himself face to face with me, and panting, took off his hat with ironic obeisance.

"Good morning, Monsieur Pelissier!" I started to laugh but checked it hastily. There was a little running note of hysteria in my voice which warned me to control myself. "I couldn't say it before, because you were asleep. See! I have hurt my arm!"

"Ah, Mademoiselle, that is a great pity! How did it happen?"

He came toward me, and I moved along confidentially and gave him room to seat himself beside me.

"I tried to climb a tree, and I fell and scraped it, and wrenched my shoulder," I chattered on as lightly as I could. I noticed the little glint which came into his eyes when I mentioned the tree, and giggled like a simpleton. "Oh, Monsieur, you did look funny sitting there fast asleep in the hall! I was a little angry with you and Aunt Julie, too, to treat me like a naughty child who couldn't be trusted not to disobey and I made up my mind that I would slip out in spite of you, and I did!"

I added the last with a naive air of triumph, and he laughed somewhat uneasily, favoring me with a sharp sidelong glance. I saw that he didn't quite know how to accept my sudden change of front, and I was determined to make the most of his bewilderment.

"Alaric was mistaken about that young man leaving the Barford bungalow. I've seen him again, and what is more I've been talking to him!" I went on gaily, quite as if I was unaware that he already knew. "I



was just determined that Aunt Julie shouldn't get the best of me, and treat me as she does Lorna and Bijou, but I'm sorry now. He's quite a stupid ordinary sort of young man, not a bit good fun!"

I paused, inwardly aghast at the fluency of my mendacity, and he asked, in an ominously quiet voice.

"And where did you meet him, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, on the beach," I returned frankly. "I walked along with him to a pile of rock back there, and sat down for a few minutes. He—he wanted to bind up my arm for me, but there wasn't anything but salt water to bathe it with, and after a little while I thought I'd better go home. If you'll promise not to say anything to Aunt Julie about the trick I played on you, I'll tell you a little joke!"

"Ah, Mademoiselle, I cannot promise that!" he was smiling though, in a relieved fashion, and I knew that I had won. "You have been *tres méchante* to disobey, and it was not in good taste, this rendezvous with a strange young man!"

"But I won't do it again, ever!" I protested, like a repentant child. "I didn't give you away, you know, Monsieur Pelissier, about going to see a lady on the other island, and then fibbing about it! You might be generous!"

"Well, we shall see! Poor little arm!" he stroked it, tenderly, and my flesh crept beneath his touch. "What is it, this little joke you have to tell me?"

"You'd never guess!" I replied, giggling. "You remember that afternoon, when the storm came up, and you were so—so horrid to me? Well, that young man heard Aunt Julie shrieking for Lucie, and he thought it was I! So this morning, I told him I was her niece, Lucy Smith, and he believed it! He—he wanted to call but I discouraged that!"

Monsieur Pelissier laughed, outright, and I joined him, merrily. His was not a very pleasant laugh, but it fell like music on my ears. My bold stroke had succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. Perhaps the inward consciousness that I was only telling what had been at one time the literal truth, had lent a ring of sincerity to my voice which absolutely convinced him.

As it was, he pressed my hand, and cried in unfeigned relief and merriment.

"Ah, you American ingenues! Is it any wonder that we abase ourselves before you? You are irresistible, *comme le diable!* The joke, it is really too good to keep just between us! We must tell the others! But they will laugh!"

"Monsieur!" I protested, in an injured fashion. "It is too good to tell them! I will not give Aunt Julie the satisfaction! I have trusted you, I have confided in you, and now you betray me!"

"And why have you trusted me, Mademoiselle?" he asked, with amazing frankness. "You have not before this morning chosen to honor me with your confidence!"

I shrugged. I wasn't prepared for this.

"You were not kind!" I protested, guilelessly. "You treated me as the rest did, like a perfect child! Perhaps it is because I succeeded so easily in outwitting you this morning, or it may be just the contrast with that stupid young man, but I have come to the conclusion that we shall be good friends. You are not like the others, Monsieur, I could not help seeing that from the first. You are a man of the world, you have a sense of humor, and it has seemed to me sometimes that you were laughing at them all, as well as at me! Even Lorna, different as she is from the rest of the family, does not understand you as well as I do!"

I added the last sentence diplomatically, but I saw at once that it hadn't been necessary. Clever as he was, I had struck a responsive chord in his egotism, and he drank in my crass flattery, with thirsty greed.

"And you, Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed. "Permit me to make my compliments to you! That pretty little head of yours is not empty, it seems! And you—you are also quite different from the rest!"

I followed up my advantage quickly.

"Then you will not tell them? You said just now, Monsieur, that it was not in good taste, for me to talk to that young man without regard to the conventions. Do you think that scene which Aunt Julie created on the veranda the other day was in better taste? Don't you think it would be well to avoid a repetition of that

if we can? Come, Monsieur Pelissier, we went for a little stroll together, you and I, this morning, did we not?"

"You daughters of Eve!" he sighed, and rolled his eyes. "You tempt the poor men, even as your universal mother did before you—and we fall! Mademoiselle, it shall be as you desire, I am as wax in your hands. We will keep our little secrets, we two, and we shall be friends. But there must be no more adventures like that of this morning, you comprehend. I, also, am a guest of Mrs. Smith, and it would be my duty to tell her."

"No more!" I cried gaily. "Did I not tell you he was stupid? Come, it is growing late, and I find that my arm still pains a little. Let us go back."

He sprang up, in instant solicitude.

"The poor arm! I, too, am stupid like the others, for I had quite forgotten it! We will return at once that it may be cared for."

He guided me to the path, and we set briskly out for the house.

My spirits were rising, unaccountably. The truth, horrible as it was, had been almost a relief after the vague doubts and seemingly purposeless mysteries of the last days, and although the hazard of escape still lay before me, I was confident that Gilbert's plan would succeed. This Monsieur Pelissier was by far the cleverest of the whole nefarious gang, with the probable

exception of the man who passed himself off as Mr. Fordyce, and who, I shrewdly suspected, was the ring-leader of the whole dastardly group. If I had so easily hoodwinked the Frenchman, I should have little trouble with the others. I fancied he had fallen in with my plan so readily because it would help to conceal from the others the fact that he had failed in his trust, and given me the opportunity to slip away, in spite of their crafty precautions.

I chattered on gaily as we neared the house. I did not want to give him time to think, to begin to wonder if the swift change in my manner toward him held a deeper significance than appeared upon the surface. His fears were completely lulled, and he was laughing lightly at some silly remark of mine as we rounded the corner, and burst upon the view of the psuedo-Smiths, who were assembled in an anxious group on the veranda.

"Good morning!" I said, as sweetly as I could, looking from one to another of their worried, expectant faces with new eyes. Knowing the truth, I wondered how even after a lapse of years since I had seen the real Smiths I had for a moment been deceived. Theirs was the vulgarity bred of the cities, not of the simple open life of the ranches and oil-fields. Accepting the thin veneer of cultivation for what it was, I had taken the rest for granted. What a selfconfident little idiot I had proved myself!

"Where in the world have you two been?" demanded the woman who had called herself Aunt Julie.

"We went for a little stroll, Mademoiselle and I," Monsieur Pelissier played up promptly.

"But your arm!" the false Bijou screamed suddenly to me. "It's all blood!"

"What has happened? How did you hurt yourself?" cried "Aunt Julie," her accents sharpened with swift apprehension.

"Mademoiselle had the misfortune to stumble over a fallen tree," the Frenchman replied for me. "It was most regrettable, and very careless of me not to have been at her side to assist her."

The double significance of his added remark was not lost upon me, and I smiled as I said reassuringly:

"It really isn't anything, Aunt Julie. I only scraped my arm a little. I will go now and bathe it, and change my gown. I won't keep you waiting for breakfast."

I turned to go into the house, with a sigh of relief that the worst was over; and then without a sign of warning, the end of the farce came! It was such a little thing, too, which precipitated it—I dropped my handkerchief. Monsieur Pelissier jumped for it, but unluckily, I was too quick for him. Unluckily, for as I stooped to recover it, that telltale fragment of newspaper slipped from my blouse!

Something seemed to clutch me by the throat, and for an instant I stood, spellbound, while a perverse

breeze caught it and swirled it, face uppermost, to the feet of the pseudo Mrs. Smith!

The great black letters stared up accusingly: "Maida Waring Still Missing. Police Baffled. No Clue Yet to Abductors."

Monsieur Pelissier drew in his breath with a sharp sibilant hiss, and an electrified stir swept over the tense group. Then something seemed to snap inside of me, and I sprang toward the bit of paper, but it was too late. Alaric lunged forward and seized it and in the moment of silence which followed, I heard Bijou's queer, choking gasp. Monsieur Pelissier was the first to speak.

"The game is up, it would seem!" he remarked slowly, with a shrug of comprehensive shoulders.

"Yes!" I cried. "I know now that you are imposters, all of you! You will spend the rest of your lives in prison for this outrage, when my father finds you!"

My courage had risen boldly to meet this unexpected calamity and I felt a savage exultant joy sweep over me that I need no longer mask my rage and contempt.

"Where did you get this paper, girl? Who told you?" Aunt Julie advanced with the ominous glitter in her eyes.

"Need you ask?" the Frenchman intervened, with an ugly smile. "That young man gave it to her of course. We have him to deal with now. She fooled me nicely this morning, the little minx!" He turned to me with

an ironic bow. "Again my compliments, Mademoiselle! I did not believe you capable of it! The stage has lost an *ingenue par excellence*!"

"Cut it out!" growled Alaric, fiercely. "I told you from the start this was a damn fool game to play, and now you see what's come of it!"

"He'll get away!" Aunt Julie screamed suddenly. "That man! He knows! He'll escape while you stand here quarreling and we shall be lost. Leave the girl to me, and attend to him!"

"Oh, he's safe enough, for the time being!" Alaric leered. "He won't get off the island, I promise you. Our boats are chained fast, and I fixed his last night."

Bijou sobbed hysterically and covered her face with her hands, and as the sun glinted on her pointed, polished nails, a lightning flash of memory returned to me.

"Oh, my Gawd!" she moaned. "I knew it wouldn't work! I knew it! I told Herman so, but he wouldn't listen!"

"Shut up, you fool!" roared Alaric, but I had scarcely heard. I advanced impetuously to where she cowered against the veranda rail.

"Why I know you!" I cried triumphantly. "You who palmed yourself off as Bijou Smith—you're May Grady, and you were my father's stenographer until he discharged you for dishonesty for selling his business secrets to outsiders! I thought before that I had



seen you and when the sun shone on your nails just now, I knew!"

"That's enough out of you!" the pseudo Aunt Julie stormed. "You'll be put where you won't talk so much!"

"I don't care what you do with me!" I cried, recklessly. "You'll answer to my father and to the law for what you have done, be sure of that. To think that I should ever have mistaken you for my Aunt Julie! I felt that something was wrong two days ago when you were so angry you forgot to lisp! I should have known then!"

She sprang upon me, with her arm upraised, as if to strike me to the ground, but the Frenchman seized her in a grip of steel.

"Connie, don't," May Grady moaned hysterically.

Alaric turned upon her roughly, and half-pushed, half-flung her into the hall.

"Get out of the way, and keep out, if you know what's good for you!" he growled. "You'll give the whole show away next!"

"Control yourself!" Monsieur Pelissier said warningly, in a low authoritative tone to the distraught woman he held. "Remember our orders! No abuse, and no force unless it is absolutely necessary. Mademoiselle," he turned to me with a travesty of deprecation in his manner. "Will you retire quietly with Lorna, or must we escort you?"

The girl he spoke of as Lorna had stood by quietly since the moment of their exposure, and now she came to me, and laid her hand gently on my arm.

"Remember what I have said to you, Maida. I have tried to be your friend," she said softly. "Come with me now. It will be best for you."

I shrank from her touch.

"Oh!" I cried. "Don't touch me! I thought you were different from the others, but you are not! You are wicked, as bad as they! How dared you speak of my mother to me. Her name was a desecration, coming from your lips!"

She stepped back with a little shrug, and Alaric and the Frenchman advanced one on each side of me. They took hold of my arms, not roughly but firmly, and turning me toward the door, forced me forward.

The horror of it all suddenly swept over me overwhelmingly, and I could feel my knees giving way. For the third time that morning a swift sinking faintness crept up and all but enveloped me. I could feel my senses reeling, but the thought of Gilbert came like a steadying hand laid on my wildly beating heart. He would help me, he would save me!

With "Mrs. Smith" bringing up in the rear, they propelled me into the hall, and there we came face to face with the housekeeper at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, Mrs. Macpherson!" I cried. "Help! Help! I am Maida Waring! These people are kidnappers!"

They are holding me prisoner! Get word to the mainland, to my father, to the police!"

She stood transfixed, her broad, honest face blank with bewilderment, as Mrs. Smith bustled toward her.

"It has come, Mrs. Macpherson!" she said, in a low, meaning tone. "She has taken a bad turn again, poor child! You know I told you we were afraid of just such a seizure as this!"

"Puir lassie!" Mrs. Macpherson shook her head in shocked pity. "Puir feckless thing! Would it not be well, madam, to fetch a dochtor frae the toon?"

"I am not crazy!" I cried wildly. "I am as sane as you! Get a doctor, get anybody from the mainland who will listen to me, and you will be well rewarded, I promise you! These people are committing a crime!"

"Aunt Julie" touched her handkerchief to her eyes hypocritically.

"Poor little girl!" she sighed. "It's terrible, isn't it? No, we don't need a doctor. We know just what to do for her, she's had these hallucinations so often! We can only give her absolute quiet and silence and rest."

There was no hope for me here! The stolid Scotch-woman evidently believed her, and stood staring with half-frightened, wholly sympathetic eyes as they bore me into the library. These diabolically clever schemers had prepared for even this contingency! All the servants had probably been informed that I was a

harmless lunatic, and being cut off themselves from the mainland, had not learned of the countrywide search for me! That explained the stupid, scared way the parlor maid behaved when I encountered her on the morning after our arrival. How blindly I had disregarded a thousand significant things, which should have warned me of the truth!

They forced me through the library into the billiard room, and then with a sickening sense of dismay, I realized their intent. They were going to lock me in the cabin, that impregnable room built from part of a ship, and from it I could not hope to escape!

A sob welled up in my throat, but I choked it back fiercely. These horrible people should not see me break down, while my senses remained to me! I might indeed be helpless in their hands, but they would not be given an opportunity to gloat over my despair! I set my teeth in my quivering lip and held my head high, and so crossed the threshold of the room which was to be my prison.

The two men loosed their hold upon me, and as they withdrew I slowly turned and faced the woman who had duped me, and taken me from under Miss Farmingdale's eyes. She was glaring at me, with a derisive malevolent smile curving her thin lips.

"You see what your sneaking and prying has brought you to!" she sneered. "If you had left well enough alone, my dear Maida, you would have been treated

with all indulgence, and have been none the wiser until the moment of your release. As it is, you have only yourself to thank for this situation."

"None the wiser!" I echoed in infinite scorn. "Do you imagine that I have not been aware from the beginning, in spite of your elaborate precautions, that there was something wrong? You never have been for one instant the Aunt Julie I remembered. She was a plain, simple, wholehearted woman, not vicious and unspeakably vulgar. She was commonplace, not common! I must inevitably have discovered the truth for myself, unaided, before long. I know who Bijou is at least, and I shall not forget that she addressed you just now as 'Connie.' That will be something for the authorities to work upon, when I am free."

"You are not free yet, however," she replied, significantly. "It is by no means certain that you ever will be! Perhaps, if you are—*when* you are—you will find it advantageous to indulge in a convenient loss of memory. You are just as far now from being restored to your father as you were the day we sailed from New York, and you can disabuse your mind at once of the idea that your young man will rescue you; we will take good care of that. There is only one thing more which I have to say to you. Remember when lunatics, however harmless, become violent, they are put into straight-jackets. I should advise you to attempt no disturbance. It would have no effect upon us

and only a very disastrous one upon yourself."

She turned and walked from the room, leaving me standing there, speechless, gazing at her in unutterable horror and loathing. The heavy oak door slammed after her, and I heard the key grate in the lock, and a massive bolt shot into place. I was a prisoner, indeed!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *In Duress.*

**F**OR a long time I stood quite still where she had left me, looking at the closed door as if I had been turned to stone. Then it seemed as though something gave way in my heart, and I crumbled to a little heap on the floor, my pent-up fear and horror, and anger, too, sweeping over me like an engulfing wave. I felt utterly helpless, lost forever! If Gilbert should manage to avoid falling into their clutches, he would never find me here, and even though he did, there was no possible way of escape from this room, which was as impregnable as a fortress.

Should Gilbert, all unsuspecting of the truth, scale the ladder to my window that evening to rescue me, he might walk straight into their hands! If I could only warn him! If I could only convey to him in some way the knowledge that our plans had miscarried, and through no voluntary act of mine, I had failed in my promise!

What would be the end of it all? Would the police obtain some clue, which would lead them here in time to save me, to save us both? Would Daddy accede to the outrageous demands of these people, and pay the enormous ransom they asked, in spite of the advice of the authorities, or would this desperate crew in the event of their plot seeming defeated, kill me and fly the country?

I thought of that sinister mound of earth in the depth of the woods, and of that terrible choking cry I had heard the night of our arrival, and I trembled anew. In the light of the recent revelations, there was no doubt in my mind but that someone had attempted to thwart their scheme, or at least had shown suspicion of it, and had been summarily done to death. With one murder on their souls, they would not hesitate to do away with Gilbert, or with me, if their plans failed, and discovery threatened. Oh, would I ever live to see Daddy again, to feel Gilbert's strong arm about me, and to know that I was safe with them both?

As I lay weeping out my terror and despair, a sound broke upon my ears which aroused me to a quick realization of the present. It was the rapid, diminishing crackle and whirr of the racing motor-boat. Alaric or Monsieur Pelissier must have departed post-haste for the mainland, to send a message of warning to the others who were concerned



in the scheme, probably the man who had posed as Daddy's broker, Mr. Fordyce, for one. With the thought of him came again the same vague sense of familiarity with his appearance. I could not recall anyone of my possible acquaintance who possessed such striking snow-white hair, but that had seemed somehow an incongruous note. His eyes, as I remembered them, had been so youthfully keen and piercing, and his bearing that of a man in the full prime of life. The hair might have been merely a wig, of course, an attempt at a disguise which his every attribute had belied.

Had the girl, May Grady, referred to him when she cried: "I knew it wouldn't work! I told Herman so?" I was quite sure I had never known anyone named "Herman"! Who could he have been, this man with the tone and gesture of a public speaker, an orator——.

Suddenly I heard footsteps pause outside my door, and the bolt withdrawn. I rose weakly to my feet, and dragged myself to one of the bunks, where I sank down just as the door slowly opened and Lorna entered.

She bore a basin of warm water, which she placed upon the table, and turning, relocked the door. Then she came quietly to me.

"I want to dress your arm, if you will allow me to, Maida," she said.

"Oh, no!" I shrank away from her. "—I—I will attend to it myself."

"You can't do it very well with your left hand," she said. "Don't be foolish. I only wish to make you as comfortable as I can."

"Go away!" I cried. "I couldn't bear the touch of your hand! You are wicked—wicked!"

She turned without a word and left the room, and I tore my sleeve further open and bandaged my arm and shoulder as well as I could, and when she returned, as she presently did with a breakfast tray, I felt a little more calm and collected.

Lorna did not make an effort to speak to me again, but taking the basin of water, she went out and bolted the door. I realized all at once that I was faint with hunger, and the steaming dishes on the tray exuded a very appetizing odor; but I could not eat, the food seemed to choke me. I drank the coffee though, and felt better for it. I knew that I must keep all my wits about me, and be instantly on the alert to respond to any sign from Gilbert that he knew where I was confined and had some plan for my rescue. I didn't think they would attempt to drug me again, they would fancy me secure as I was, and since coffee was an antidote for narcotic drugs, I did not believe they would have used it as a medium to render me insensible.

When I had finished, I examined thoroughly the room in which I was confined. It was tiny and bare, with the table and bunks, as I have said before, clamped to the floor. In place of windows there were four portholes, so small that nothing larger than a monkey could have passed through them, and only one door, that through which I had entered. The walls were of seasoned wood and from the depths of the porthole rims must have been four or five inches thick. There was no possible mode of egress save that door opening into the billiard room, and I could not doubt that it would be well guarded. The room itself would have withstood a veritable siege.

While I wandered restlessly about, I heard the motorboat return, and then a distant murmur of voices, although I could not distinguish a word. When it died away, the silence remained unbroken for so long that it seemed the day must surely pass soon, and night come. I felt as if I should go quite mad in the hideous suspense and terror! I wanted to scream and beat upon the walls, and only the vague threat of a straightjacket forced me to retain a semblance of self control.

After the interminable hours, Lorna appeared with a lunch tray, but I left it untouched, and through all that weary afternoon I paced the floor ceaselessly, a prey to darkest despair.

At last the moving disks of sunlight which filtered through the portholes paled and faded, and twilight came. I sank exhausted upon the bunk. Would the fall of night bring Gilbert to me? Even though he could do nothing to release me, the sound of his voice, whispering words of comfort and consolation, the reassurance that he was still free and unmolested, awaiting a chance opportunity to aid me, would have brought immeasurable relief. This cabin-room was a wing apart from the rest of the house, and I knew that, allowing for the foundation on which it was raised, the portholes were not more than seven or eight feet from the ground.

Once I thought I heard Laddie bark, and I held my breath, but no further sound came to my ears, and the twilight deepened and grew in the silence, until I could scarcely distinguish the objects in the room.

All at once, I heard a metallic click, and the cabin was flooded with light. Someone had evidently touched an electric switch in another part of the house, which connected with this room. As I blinked in the sudden glare, the bolt rattled again, the door swung open, and Lorna entered with my dinner.

She paused when her eyes fell upon the lunch tray, with its covered dishes just as she had left it, and she turned to me hesitatingly.

"Maida, you must eat or you will be ill. Won't you please try? Can't you understand that we mean you no harm? We want you to be as comfortable as you can under the circumstances. It won't help matters for you to fast, and you will only weaken yourself terribly."

"Why are you so anxious that I should eat?" I demanded, bitterly. "Is the food drugged, like the punch which was given me on the yacht?"

"You know that?" she spoke quickly, then checked herself and added, after a pause: "I give you my word that this has not been tampered with. I brought it straight from the pantry myself."

"Your word!" I repeated, with immeasurable scorn, and she flushed darkly.

"Don't you know that if it was considered necessary to drug you, a hypodermic would be given you by force, now that all pretense is at an end? Please be sensible, Maida! Whether you realize it or not, I have tried to be your friend, and make everything as easy as possible for you. I know you have little reason to trust me, but won't you try to believe that I would help you if I could?"

She spoke with a passionate earnestness which there was no mistaking, and I looked at her curiously.

"Why?" I asked.

"I don't know!" her voice was very low, and

she glanced apprehensively over her shoulder at the closed door. "I tried to steel myself against you, but you were so gentle and little and alone, that I could not help feeling sorry for you. I wish I didn't!"

"I don't understand why you should have hated me?" I said slowly. "I have never harmed you. I liked you from the beginning. I felt that you were different from the others, but I couldn't explain it to myself. What have I ever done that you should want to injure me?"

"Oh, it isn't you! It is all that you represent, all that you have had which was denied me; love, and luxury, and a sheltered life! It wasn't fair that through no fault of mine I should have none of these things!"

"And if my father should accord to your demands, do you think that what you gain in this way will ever bring you happiness!" I asked, more gently. A vague plan was forming somewhere in the back of my mind, but I must have time to think it out.

"It will bring me what I want more than anything in the world, and then my happiness will lie in my own hands," she replied, shrugging. "I would not undo what has been done if I could, and yet I am sorry for you. You will believe that, won't you? I would do anything I could to make the

situation less intolerable for you. Now please try to eat a little!"

I would not yield to her coaxing, however, and after a little while she took the tray away, and returned with bedding for one of the bunks and an armful of my clothing and toilet things. Then she said good night rather wistfully and departed, and after an hour or more the lights were suddenly switched off.

I sat in the darkness, straining my ears to catch the slightest sound from without but none came, save the dismal, incessant croak of the tree-toads and chirp of crickets, and now and then the eerie hooting of an owl. The sky was overcast and no ray of moonlight crept in to relieve the dense blackness all about me.

Would Gilbert come? Would he be able to find me, and save me? What would the night bring forth? I sat huddled in my chair, staring into the darkness until shadows seemed to take shape and form and move about me stealthily, and as the hours passed, in spite of myself my heavy eyelids drooped.

All at once the sound of a disturbance within the house aroused me from the stupor of misery into which I had fallen. It was confused and muffled by the thick walls, but unmistakable, and I started in sudden apprehension from my chair. I heard

subdued shouting, and the tramp and scuffle of feet, and then a dull, heavy thud, and silence. What could it have been? Had Gilbert tried to force his way into the house to my rescue, and been attacked and overpowered? Had he contrived instead to leave the island, and summon help from the mainland? I had heard no sound of an approaching boat. If I could only know what had taken place!

My self-control gave way under the strain of the long hours of fear and suspense and I beat frantically upon the heavy door with all my strength, crying out as loudly as I could, but no one came to me, no further sound from without broke the deathlike stillness. At length, spent and breathless, I staggered back from the door, and leaned, trembling against the wall. One of the portholes was just above my head and the cool night air, blowing softly in upon me, helped to calm me and bring me partly to myself.

I felt my way to the bunk, and sank wearily down upon it. I was helpless; there was nothing I could do but wait, and oh, the waiting was torture! Something had happened to Gilbert, of that I was sure. Perhaps they had killed him! Oh, if the girl called Lorna had any mercy for me in her heart she would come to me and tell me!

The moments dragged by and then in the still-



ness I heard the mournful howling of a dog. It was Laddie! I sprang from the bunk with fresh torture of mind. His cry was not like the night before, when he had howled at the moon; there was a wailing note of eager anxiety in it, and it came nearer and nearer. Clearly, he was searching for his master. What had they done with Gilbert? Would his faithful, staunch-hearted little friend find his way to him? I prayed that he might!

But suddenly, through the open porthole, I heard a window raised above, and a thick voice, very much like Alaric's, shouted a curse. Heavy feet tramped hastily down the stairs, the massive front door clanged with a jar that fairly shook the house, and there was a mighty thrashing about of the shrubbery and undergrowth outside. I heard Laddie growl ominously, then a revolver shot rang out and hard upon it a sharp yelp of agony from the dog, and afterwards—silence.

I cowered down and covered my face with my trembling hands.

"Laddie," I moaned. "Poor, poor Laddie! Little true friend, they have killed you, too!"

I sat there listening through all the long hours of that night, but no further sound broke the stillness save the sighing of the wind in the trees, and that died down in the hush before the dawn. I did not sleep, but I think my senses must have left

me mercifully for a time. I remember that I tried to pray, at least, but the words would not form themselves in my mind, and even God seemed very far away, and heedless of my extremity.

By and by a faint gray haze crept in at the port-hole and broadened and grew until the sun rose, and a golden beam of light stole in and brightened all my prison, but I was scarcely conscious of it. I felt cold and numb, as if I were already dead and nothing seemed to matter very much.

The girl Lorna came presently, and I heard as if from far away her exclamation of shocked pity at sight of my drawn face. She dragged in a little toilet stand, and brought hot water and fresh linen, and helped me bathe and dress myself in a clean, cool gown. She even brushed my hair, and I no longer shrank from her touch. My spirit seemed completely broken and I would not have cared if death had come to me at that moment.

I obediently drank the coffee she gave me but I turned with indescribable loathing from the food although it was nearly twenty-four hours since I had choked down a few mouthfuls from the breakfast tray she had brought me the previous day. I was aware that she was speaking to me compassionately, but I could only shake my head in reply.

When she turned to leave the room, however, I managed to rouse myself at last.

"Please," I stammered, "will you tell me of the little dog?"

She came quickly to me.

"What is it?" she asked. "What little dog?"

"Laddie. They—they shot him, last night. I could not bear to think that perhaps he was wandering about in the woods, maimed and suffering. He belonged to that young man, you know."

I spoke as if I knew that Gilbert were dead. Indeed, I felt at that moment that he must be. Had he lived, he would have come to me, in spite of them all, for he had promised!

She gave a quick little exclamation of pity.

"The poor little dog! I will go and find him, and if he is not dead I will do what I can for him. I will tell you when I come in again."

"Thank you." I sank down once more upon the bunk.

"You are ill, *chérie*! You suffer! Ah, Maida, in spite of all it means to me, I wish I had not helped to bring this upon you! What you said yesterday—it has made me afraid! You asked if that which I gained through this could bring me happiness. You have made me wonder if happiness can be bought, with blood money! It is too late now, but I wish that my hands were clean! As for you, *pauvre petite*, you must not grieve, for you will be happy, I am sure; you will soon be restored to

your father. You must try to believe that, and take heart again."

She laid her cool hand lightly on my throbbing forehead for a moment, and was gone, and I sat as she had left me, my dazed brain refusing the effort of coherent thought.

A little later, I heard the launch depart for the mainland and return, but it conveyed no definite impression to my mind until presently the key rasped in the lock, the bolt was shot back, and the door swung open. Then indeed I was roused from the inertia into which I had fallen, for the man who stood before me was neither Alaric nor Monsieur Pelissier. He was taller and more heavily built than either, and the look he bent upon me was keen and piercingly compelling, from beneath his mass of snow-white hair. It was the man who had called himself Mr. Fordyce.

I sat motionless, gazing steadily at him, and betraying by not so much as the droop of an eyelash the surprise of this unlooked for contingency. My dormant mind was eagerly alert once more, and I instantly grasped the fact that this man was here for some definite purpose other than merely to view the present situation for himself. Had he come to take me to Daddy? Could it be that he had paid the exorbitant sum they demanded for my release, or were they threatened with discovery )

and deemed it no longer safe to hold me in captivity? Was this hideous nightmare at an end, and freedom in sight?

"My dear young lady!" he came forward with his quick, warm fatherly smile, which now quite failed to impose upon me. "I regret exceedingly that it was necessary to resort to these measures. I hope that you have been made as comfortable as possible."

"Did you come here to assure me of that?" I asked evenly, my eyes never leaving his face.

"Surely you know I would wish no harm to come to you?" he went on.

I laughed significantly.

"I can quite understand that," I said. "It would scarcely be to your interest, would it? May I ask the reason for this intrusion?"

"I came for a little friendly talk, Miss Waring." He seated himself upon the opposite bunk and regarded me with what was intended for a benevolent glance. "I assure you that this situation is as distasteful to me, to us, as it can possibly be to you."

"Indeed?" I shrugged. "Then why not end it, and take me to my father?"

"That is a matter which is entirely in your hands." He paused and moved a little, as if my intent, unswerving gaze was disconcerting even

to his iron-clad effrontery. "I would gladly act upon your suggestion, but unfortunately there is a little formality to be concluded first, in which you father does not appear to acquiesce. I am in hopes, however, that you can persuade him."

So that was it! Daddy was obdurate, and he had come to make a tool of me, in attempting to coerce him! I smiled faintly, but made no reply.

"We had tried to make your little sojourn with us, until you discovered the truth, as pleasant as the circumstances permitted," he continued, after a moment. "But I have no doubt that you wish to return to your father as soon as it can be arranged. If you will write a little note to him, explaining the existing conditions, which I shall—er—dictate for you, I am sure he will accede to our request without further delay. One word from you, remember, my dear Miss Waring, and you are free!"

He paused again, then as I made no effort to break the silence, he added persuasively:

"Shall I send for a pen and paper? Come, Miss Waring, I am waiting for your answer."

I started, as if aroused from a train of thought totally at variance with his suggestion.

"Oh," I remarked, "I was just thinking of something."

"The matter is very simple," he urged. "You

must realize that you have no possible alternative."

"The letter?" I asked blandly. "Oh, I wasn't troubling my head about that! I was trying to remember who you are and where I had seen you."

"It would be more profitable for you to concern yourself with my proposition," he said quickly, with a scowl.

"Perhaps not," I returned blandly. "It will be a source at least of satisfaction to me later to be able to identify you. I wonder where I have seen you before! I know part of your name, of course, but that doesn't assist my memory."

"My name!" he repeated, his *sangfroid* momentarily gone. "How can you know that?"

"May Grady, my father's former stenographer, spoke of you as 'Herman'. Now, if you will remove that venerable wig you are wearing for a moment, I may be able to place you for future reference. I know that somewhere I have seen your face before."

"You are mistaken!" he cried harshly. "May Grady, as you call her, did not refer to me. But enough of this! You try my patience! Will you write that letter?"

I rose.

"Not while I have my reason, or the strength to guide a pen! You may torture me, starve me, do anything you like, but I will never play into

your hands, and help you in your vile scheme to mulct my father!"

"We shall see." He rose to his feet, also, and although he spoke restrainedly, his keen eyes glistened ominously. "You may have cause to change your mind later. I warn you, that unless you do as I ask, you shall never leave this place alive! As to starving you, I understand that you have attempted that for yourself. If you continue in the course you are pursuing, I shall see that you are forcibly fed, and if you have been reading in the newspapers of the methods employed with refractory suffragettes in the English prisons, you will realize that it is a distinctly unpleasant experience. You have been humored, my dear young woman, and treated with every possible courtesy, but the time has come for you to understand that you are in our power, and must obey. I will leave you now to think the matter over, and when I come again I shall hope to find you more sensible. Remember that if you are not I shall resort to other measures to make you amenable to reason."

He stalked from the room, and the bolt was shot into place with a jar that made the heavy door quiver.

I stood lost in thought. In the moment when my reference to his identity had shaken his control of himself, he had raised his voice slightly,



and its ringing, sonorous, trained tones had quickened into life that vague, latent sense of familiarity. Could it be possible that he was a public speaker, an orator whom I had once heard somewhere? Miss Farmingdale had sent us in squads to lectures of all sorts, scientific, altruistic, religious,—

I suddenly gripped my throat convulsively with both hands to still the cry which rose to my lips! I knew him! Why had I not thought of that before? I had seen him but once, although his pictures had been in all the papers in the country in connection with every anarchistic disturbance of recent years! It had been like his superb egotism to dare to show himself in my presence with no more adequate disguise than the wig afforded. I would not spare him now! He was too well-known, he had advertised his personality too widely to find sanctuary in any corner of the world where the police could not rout him out, and punish him for his crime! He had for once put into vicious practice his loud-mouthed ranting against moneyed classes, and the license he preached for God-given liberty to ignorant souls had brought him at last to the commission of crime.

My thoughts turned to the others. From what walks of life had he gathered the little group who had done his bidding? Pelissier was plainly an adventurer; Alaric a mere strong-arm crook. I

remembered his dexterity and skill at bridge; possibly he was a low-grade swindler and card-sharp. But Lorna! She was of totally different caliber; highly educated, sensitively organized, temperamental, a gentlewoman; how had she become enmeshed in this net of crime? Her presence among the rest was incongruous, incomprehensible.

And the woman who had accomplished the initial task, and in the guise of Mrs. Smith abducted me from the school—what of her? She had seemed from the first moment a strange anomaly, a mixture of refinement and vulgarity, tact, intelligence and crass stupidity. She had proved herself an actress of no mean ability, and she must previously too, have wormed herself in some way into the real Mrs. Smith's friendship. The little mannerisms, the appearance, the lisp, the knowledge of intimate details of the past could only have been acquired after long, close study and association.

When, goaded into sudden frenzy by the revelation that her fraud had been discovered, she had turned savagely upon me, the Grady girl had cried: "Connie, don't!"

Connie? Then, like a flash, the memory returned to me of our conversation at tea time on the afternoon of our arrival, and her consternation at my inadvertent mention of Connie Cole, the notorious bank swindler. Two days later, she had

announced the expected arrival of Mr. Hilton, and boasted because of an idle taunt of Alaric, that she had never made a financial mistake. Alaric sneered openly, and when she called him to account for it, he uttered the single name "Bridgewater" and she had almost collapsed. Amos Bridgewater, of the Mammoth Trust Company, had been the man to unmask Connie Cole, and bring her to justice!

Had the long arm of coincidence reached even to this remote island? Had my innocent, random shot found a mark I least suspected? Was "Aunt Julie" indeed the infamous Connie Cole?

## CHAPTER XV

### *Hope.*

THE entrance of Lorna with a bowl of steaming broth, put an end to my cogitations for the time. She looked pale and wan, and there were traces of tears on her cheeks.

"My poor child," she said in a low, hurried voice, "you will try to drink this, for your own sake, for the sake of your father? You must keep up your strength!"

She glanced back half fearfully at the door, and added in a whisper:

"The little dog, he is quite safe. I have found him. He was hurt, but I have tended him and he will not die. I have hidden him away where they shall not discover and kill him."

"You are very good," I said gratefully. "I—I am sorry for the horrid things I said to you, but I know now that you meant to be as kind as you could. I—I suppose you will not tell me anything of his master? Is he a prisoner, too—or dead?"

"Ah, no—not that! You must not ask me!" There was a quick note of distress in her voice. "Come! This broth, it will be good for you, and you need it, *pauvre petite*."

I took the bowl from her hands and sipped the contents obediently. She was right. I must not weaken, I must be strong and ready for any emergency which might present itself. "*Pauvre petite!*" She had called me that yesterday, too. Indeed from the first day when she had boarded the yacht I noticed that little French phrases had crept into her speech and odd, dainty foreign gestures and mannerisms had manifested themselves naturally in her.

"You are French, aren't you?" I asked, glancing up swiftly at her. "And you are different in so many ways from the others. How is it that a girl like you could lend herself to such a cowardly, low scheme as this?"

She drew back, started, and gazed at me speechlessly.

"Your friend, Herman Goebel, has paid me a call——" I was beginning, but she sprang forward, and laid her hand over my lips.

"Hush, for the love of God!" she breathed. "You would not live a moment longer if he heard!"

Then she withdrew her hand and added, in the merest whisper:

"How did you know?"

"I heard him lecture once, on socialism," I whispered back. "Did he think to disguise himself with that mop of white hair? 'The Man of the People' he calls himself! The man who has instigated all the riots and labor wars, the man who sits back with folded hands while the poor foolish men he has incited to destruction fight against the forces of law and order! And that woman out there, who took me away; Connie Cole, the adventuress——"

She halted me with a gesture and the trembling hands she placed upon my shoulders chilled me with their icy touch.

"Listen to me!" she said, and something in her voice made me shudder, in spite of myself. "What you are saying is madness, do you hear, madness! But you must put it from your thoughts, you must not repeat it, for if you breathe a word of this which they might hear, they will kill you as surely as I am speaking now, and I would be powerless to save you! You are but a child, you have no discretion, but you must believe what I tell you, and if you value your life, you must attend. Do not dare to speak of this again, or you will never see your father! I am traitorous to them to warn you, now, but I cannot denounce you, I cannot stand by and witness the murder of an innocent girl! I must not turn upon them, they

have trusted me, but I can and will spare you all the suffering that is possible!"

A sudden thought came to me and I cried impulsively, "And do you think that they are true, that they would not sell you out, betray you without a qualm if they could benefit themselves? I know better!"

"What do you mean?" she stepped back and a sudden gleam came into her dark-rimmed eyes.

"Your friend, for one, who calls himself Raoul Pelissier. I don't know what he is to you, but I know that he is a traitor, he has lied to you, plotted against you——"

"How do you know?" her voice came from her drawn lips in a toneless whisper, and her colorless, wan face had grown even paler. "What has he done? How has he lied?"

"Ask him where he went in the launch the day he took that man whose name I must not mention, to the mainland. He was more than two hours returning, if you remember, and he said the engine broke down, but as it happens, I know that it did not. When I taxed him with my knowledge, he implored me to say nothing of it to the rest of you, and told me a pretty tale about a lady on one of the islands to the southward. Do you know what I think? I believe that lady is an invention of Signor Marconi's! I think that he tried to get

into wireless communication with my father, or the authorities, and sell you out, at his price!"

"Raoul!" she whispered, clenching her slender hands until the knuckles almost burst through the skin. "Raoul! If I thought that!——"

"Ask him!" I repeated.

"Listen!" she cried, passionately. "It was for him that I have acted this part, that I have helped in this odious scheme! For him! If he has done what you say, if he has tried to betray us——"

"Nicolette!" We had not heard his light footsteps outside the heavy barred door, but the voice of Monsieur Pelissier came to us, harsh with fury. "Are you in there? What are you doing? Come here immediately!"

With a gesture of warning silence she picked up the empty bowl and left the room. The doors were instantly locked behind her, and I heard their voices, low and indistinguishable, but intense with suppressed rage. All at once there was a crash, as if the bowl had fallen from her hands, then followed the cruel sickening thud of blows and she screamed twice, terribly. The rush of feet came to my ears, a quick order in Herman Goebel's stern, cutting tones, and then silence.

What had happened? Had she accused the Frenchman, and been beaten to death for her temerity? I felt faint with the horror of it all! That



these people were desperate, and would not hesitate to kill me if their plans were defeated, I could no longer doubt. I would die before I would accede to their demands and beg Daddy to pay for my release, but oh, would he never find me? And Gilbert, what had they done to him? Why did he not come to save me?

At noon May Grady entered, banging my lunch tray down on the table, with a toss of her blonded head.

"There! Eat that, if you don't want to make more trouble for yourself!" she remarked with a sneer. "Little sneaking tattle-tale! Thought you'd get me into trouble, didn't you, because I spoke of Herman! You'll be sorry for that before I'm through with you! You're pretty sly, but you made a mistake that time. Little fool, you never saw the man before in your life!"

I ignored her, and she flounced out of the room with an ugly laugh. Had I not already been certain of his identity, her clumsy attempt to convince me that the man in the white wig was not Herman Goebel, would have been assurance enough of the truth. My heart sank at the thought that even if the girl called Lorna had not been killed outright by that brutal Pelissier when he struck her down, they would no longer trust her to come to me. If that Grady woman were to be my jailer

henceforth it would be doubly hard to endure my confinement, and I shrank from encountering her taunts and malicious triumph. I felt that her hatred of me was deeper than anything merely personal, it was the antagonism of caste. She was envious and bitterly resentful of a girl more fortunate by the accident of birth than she, and too vicious and small minded to realize that I was not voluntarily responsible for the difference in our positions.

The afternoon wore away in unbroken silence, and with the twilight the lights were switched on, as they had been the previous day, but a long time elapsed before anyone came to my door.

At last Miss Grady appeared bearing my dinner, and as she placed it upon the table, she glanced at the other tray.

"Decided to quit sulking and eat your lunch, didn't you?" she observed. "It's about time you came to your senses, and listened to reason."

"I ate because I wished to," I returned, coldly. "I don't care to have anything whatever to say to you." And I turned away from her.

"Still got your fine-lady airs, haven't you?" she sneered. "You'll sing a different tune before we're through with you!"

"I wish you would leave me," I said wearily. "I am not in the least afraid of you or your threats."

"Oh, aren't you!" she mimicked me. "You'll do what you're told, nevertheless. You won't get out of here in a hurry if you don't."

"I'm not so sure about that," I remarked tentatively, with a swift, side-long glance at her supercilious face.

"I suppose you think your young man will save you!" she flung at me tauntingly, while I held my breath. "Well, he won't! He tried it once, but he's where he won't be able to get into any more mischief for awhile. You needn't count on the police taking a hand, either. They've shown what they can do the past week. You'll stay here, whether you like it or not, my fine young lady, until your father ponies up that little old million dollars ransom!"

"And if he does, you don't think that you will be able to get away with it, do you?" I scoffed, although my heart beat suffocatingly. It had been almost too easy to elicit the truth from her. Gilbert was not dead! They had captured and hidden him away somewhere, but he was at least alive, and would come to my rescue when he could elude them. And he would succeed in that, I knew he would! I had only to wait!

"Get away with it?" she repeated, with a short laugh. "All the police in the world won't be able to follow us! Raoul and I will leave this country

and no one will ever know——” she caught herself up, with a little gasp of dismay at what she had disclosed, but I made a pretense of not having heard, or noted the significance of her last words.

She picked up the empty tray and moved to the door, pausing to say with a toss of her head:

“Anyway, if you hadn’t pried into things which weren’t meant for you to know, you wouldn’t be cooped up here now! You brought it all on yourself, and I hope you are enjoying it!”

The door slammed after her departing figure, and the dinner which she had brought me remained untouched, while I paced the floor in a fever of restless thought. The girl called Lorna loved Monsieur Pelissier, beyond any doubt. The admission she had made to me that morning had been wrung from her very heart. I had more than once surprised a look of jealousy on her face, when she encountered the pseudo Bijou and the Frenchman in a confidential tête-à-tête. If she suspected that the other girl had really supplanted her in his fickle affections, if she could know what I had just heard, might she not be moved to help me, in a spirit of revenge against them?

But even if I succeeded in regaining my liberty, with her aid—and unless she contrived to come to me, I could not communicate with her—I should be little better off than before.

Without Gilbert, of course, I could not hope to escape from the island. I knew nothing of the management of a motorboat, and there was no other means of reaching the mainland. Ah, if Gilbert were only free! If he could come to me!

While I wandered ceaselessly about the tiny room, tortured by vain thoughts, I became aware that the wind was rising. The great branches of the trees outside were soughing and thrashing about with a moaning, whistling sound which was indescribably dreary and forboding. The brass rim and casement of one of the portholes had been taken out, evidently worn away in the past and through the aperture came sharp, sudden gusts which fanned my heated face. There was no moon and the little round patch of sky which I could discern was heavily overcast. The coming storm would only add to the horror of it all.

A nervous depression and fear of I knew not what laid hold upon me, and tightened about by heart, although I strove desperately to rid myself of it. These people would not dare harm me, I tried to assure myself over and over. In imprisoning me they had surely done their worst, and to show further violence to me would be to defeat their own ends. And yet, if Daddy proved obdurate and the police grew hot upon their trail, so that disaster stared them in the face, their project became doomed,

and their only safety lay in flight, what, then, of me? They could not encumber themselves with a struggling captive; they would not leave me behind to tell what I already knew! What alternative fate remained for me?

I crouched upon my bunk, overwhelmed with terror at the vision conjured up by my overwrought mind. The wind had increased to a rushing, roaring fury, and the waves beat thunderously upon the shore. All at once, as if to add to the vague terror of my situation, the lights suddenly went out, and the room was plunged into pitch darkness. I would have fancied that the electricity in the air had affected the house wiring, only at that moment when the light was extinguished I had heard, faintly but distinctly, a metallic click. Someone had turned or cut off the switch.

I had no way of knowing how many hours had passed since dinner time, but I felt it must be still early. Who could have done this? What was their purpose in leaving me in darkness? I listened fearfully, but no sound broke the stillness of the house, nothing came to my ears but the sobbing, moaning breath of the wind, and the boom and swirl of the breakers.

But was that all? Was there not a soft, stealthy footfall outside my door, a light, sure hand slowly turning the key? My breath caught in my throat,

and I flung my hands out into the darkness, as if to ward off this terrible, unknown danger which threatened me. Then the massive bolt slipped back carefully, almost noiselessly and the door opened, inch by inch, admitting a fan-shaped wisp of subdued light which broadened and reached into the far corners, accentuating the shadows which lurked ominously there.

I watched it breathlessly, fascinated, unable to move or cry out, spellbound by sheer terror of the unknown.

At length, in the dim, misty radiance of the doorway, a face appeared and I all but sobbed in my relief. It was Lorna.

"Hush!" she breathed. She was wrapped in a shapeless gown of some soft gray material, and even in the dim, half-light I could see that her face was ghastly, and disfigured by great bruises and discolorations. "Don't make a sound, Maida!"

She closed the door softly behind her, and felt her way in the darkness to my side. Then, as if faint she sank down beside me and her icy hand clasped mine convulsively.

"Listen to me! I am going to help you! You shall leave this place! Your lover shall take you away, and they may suffer the consequences. I care not!"

"You know?" I whispered back.

"If he tried that day to turn traitor, and enter into negotiations of his own with your father? No, and it matters little. I know that he is false to me, and after all I have done for him, all I have endured, he has tired, thrown me aside for that painted doll! I am his wife, Maida, his wife! You did not guess that, did you? I was an actress, studying at the Conservatoire in Paris, when I met him, and I loved him blindly, following him, obeying him, helping to further his schemes which grew more and more bold and disreputable. My training made me of use to him, I could play many a part, and act the spy, and I did! He promised me that this should be the last, that no harm should come to you, that you would be none the worse for this experience, and he argued that your father could well afford to lose the money involved in the transaction. He swore that when it was over we would return to France together, and live out our lives, simply, happily, and I believed him! But today, when he suspected my pity, my sympathy for you, he—beat me, and in his rage and contempt revealed himself and his intentions for the future! Later I heard a few words between him and that woman, and I learned the truth. I had suspected them before, more than once, but *mon Dieu!* not this!"

"I know!" I said softly. "They mean to go away



together. The girl told me so herself, today."

A tremor of suppressed fury shook her slender form from head to foot, and she whispered vehemently.

"And they shall! But not together; to prison, for life! I will tell you. There is no time to lose. Tomorrow, he—the man you know—intends to force you to write that letter to your father, demanding the ransom. They are afraid to delay longer. You must go tonight, now! It is the only way. The young man, your lover, came to your window last night. He climbed a ladder and they were waiting within to spring upon him. He is locked up in the old lighthouse, on the point of rocks. I have talked with him, and he has a plan for helping you escape. I cannot get you out of this room. They are watching every moment and in an hour the man you know as Alaric will be stationed on guard just outside your door. They know that I have come. Thinking you asleep, they sent me here to give you this!"

She paused and I felt the cold touch of a hypodermic syringe beneath my fingers. I drew my hand away in swift horror.

"It was that they used upon the yacht," she went on. "The punch contained only a mild dose of veronal, so that your slumber would be too profound for you to waken at the prick of the needle.

It was morphine which kept you insensible two nights and a day."

"They feared that the approaching storm might awaken you, and you would cry out in startled apprehension. A strange, high-powered boat has been hovering about close to the inland all day, causing them great uneasiness, and if your cries were heard, all concealment might be at an end. They knew that you trusted me more than any of the rest, and if the stab of the needle aroused you, I could calm your apprehension by saying that I had come to smooth your couch and see that you were comfortable for the night."

"How horrible of them!" I shuddered. "But that boat! Do you think it means that the authorities are on their trail at last?"

I spoke as if she had not been one of them, and in league with them herself.

"How can we tell?" she returned. "We cannot wait to find out. They would kill you, I think, before they would allow you to be taken."

"If you cannot get me out of the room, how can you help me?" I asked, despairingly.

"I can set free the young man in the lighthouse, and procure for him the key of the padlock which fastens the racing boat, and I will!"

"Lorna!" I stammered. "What can I say to you! How can I ever thank you for what you are do-

ing! Come with us! Come away from these terrible people, and leave them to their fate, to escape or be captured as chance wills! My father will understand, he will do anything in the world to prove his gratitude! You can return to your own country, and forget it all, and live in the happiness which money and peace of mind can bring you!"

"No," she said softly. "I must stay with the rest, to the end. I will not suffer their plan to succeed, but I cannot enrich myself at their expense. Besides, *petite amie*, you forget the things which I have already done, for Raoul's sake. I have a—a record, which the police of more than one country will hold against me. You remember when after a long delay I reached the yacht on the day we sailed, torn and disheveled? There was no taxicab accident, as I said. I had been apprehended by the police at the last moment, but I managed to escape from them."

"Then you had not gone, after all, to meet Senator Ranger's son?" I asked.

"If he has a son I am not aware of it. That was another necessary fabrication, to account for my thoughtless words to Raoul, which you had overheard. I went to meet the man you called Goebel, for final instructions, but he did not appear. You see that even your father's influence could not save me from justice!"

"I don't believe you have done anything very terrible, before this, in spite of what you say!" I cried impulsively. "You are not really wicked, as they are, I know that you are not! How can I ever repay you for your kindness to me now?"

"By being happy, *chérie!*" Her voice trembled. "You will have love, everything to make you so, everything that has passed me by—I must go now, or they will suspect. In twenty minutes, a half-hour at most, be ready. Remember, whatever happens, whatever you may see or hear, do not be frightened, do not utter a sound! Trust me, and you shall soon be free!"

She clasped my hands tightly once more, then dropped them and moved away from me in the darkness and in another moment the door had noiselessly opened and closed.

I sat there in the tense silence, every nerve alive and tingling with eager, tremulous expectation. What would the next hour bring forth? Would she be able to keep her word, and carry out her daring plan? Would Gilbert save me?

I had no preparations to make. There was no cloak or head-covering at hand, but I was wearing a dark serge gown, and for comfort I had slipped my feet into rubber soled tennis shoes, which I found among the things she had brought me on the previous day. I could take nothing with me, and I wanted

nothing; only to get away, away from this terrible place!

The storm was coming on apace, and the strain grew upon me with every moment that dragged by. What was happening outside my prison? It already seemed that hours must have passed since she left me! I had not the slightest idea how Gilbert meant to effect my escape, and strangely enough, no thought of it entered my mind. He would come, I knew, if she succeeded in freeing him, and somehow, somehow he would rescue me. I felt it in my heart, without doubt or question, and the possible means he would take to accomplish his ends I might safely leave in his hands. My faith in him was absolute.

The wind was blowing a veritable gale, but it no longer depressed me with menacing foreboding. Rather, it held a buoyant note of rallying cheer and defiance, and I welcomed the thought of a sharp battle with the elements in the open after this interminable siege against the insidious treachery of mankind.

All at once, above the beat of the surf and moaning surge of the trees, I heard low voices outside my door, and a hand rattled the bolt. I sprang upon the bunk, pulling the covers up to my neck, and closing my eyes, just as the door opened, and footsteps sounded within the room. I held my breath while a light flashed before my eyelids, and I heard the Frenchman's low voice.

"It is well. She sleeps."

He spoke in a tone of complete satisfaction, but another voice, which I recognized as Herman Goebel's said warningly:

"Hush! Not so loud!"

"Have no fear!" Pelissier laughed softly, significantly. "A charge of dynamite would not waken her before morning. Nicolette knows how much to use in her needle. We can make our minds easy for to-night, while Craigen snores outside her door."

They withdrew and I heard the key turn, and the bolt shoot back into place. For a long time I lay motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. How nearly I had been discovered! If they had found out that Lorna had broken faith with them, and failed to carry out their instructions, her punishment would have been swift and terrible, and all chance of escape gone.

Moments passed which seemed like hours, and at length I began to despair. Lorna had not been able to elude them, and set Gilbert free! He would not come to me! My last hope must perish!

As I lay sunk in the uttermost depths of my despairing thoughts I became gradually aware of a curious grating, gnawing sound, as of a rat in the wainscoting. It had been going on for some time and with an inward qualm, I found myself wishing that they had left a light burning in the room. Suppose the awful little animal escaped from the wall,

and ran across my face? Could I refrain from screaming and arousing the snoring sentinel outside my door? I listened. The sound seemed to come from quite high up in the wall, by the porthole—that porthole from which the rim was missing, which was merely a small, round aperture edged with hard, weather-beaten wood.

The sound grew louder and continued without a pause; a steady grating crunch. On a sudden impulse I rose and tip-toed over to the place from which it came, and at that moment the wind-driven clouds parted and for a brief instant the moon cast a clear, penetrating ray straight in upon me.

From the top of the open, circular hole a straight, clean cut like a crack, appeared through the thick wooden wall, extending horizontally toward the right, and through it protruded the tip of a keen saw!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *The Escape.*

THE ray of moonlight vanished as quickly as it had appeared, but I had discerned enough in that revealing flash. Gilbert was there, outside my window! He was cutting a way through the solid beamed walls for me to escape!

I removed the heavy pitcher and bowl carefully from the stand, and placed them upon the center table. The stand itself was square and solidly built, and finding that it would bear my weight, I dragged it noiselessly, inch by inch, until it was directly beneath the open porthole. Then I climbed upon it and knelt, thrusting my hand through the aperture.

"Gilbert!" I breathed into the night. "Gilbert! Is it you? Have you come to save me?"

"Darling!" Two hands were laid tenderly on either side of my face, and I felt Gilbert's kisses on my lips. "I dared not call to you, for fear the others outside your door hear my voice, but I knew you must be



listening for me, and would not be alarmed. The French girl said she would prepare you for my coming. Only be brave, Maida, dearest, and as still as a mouse, and I'll soon have you out of this! You are all right? They have not ill-used you?"

"No." I whispered. "But I have been almost crazy with anxiety! Lorna told me you had been locked in the lighthouse. She kept her word and freed you?"

"Yes. She's a trump! We haven't a moment to lose, now. It will take me half an hour at least, to saw an opening large enough for you to pass through, in this tough, seasoned wood. It must be four or five inches thick. Thank God they left it as it originally was, without shingles or clapboard! Go to your door quietly, dear, and listen, and cough if you hear the slightest noise from within the house."

He was standing on a garden bench, his head almost on a level with mine. He had left the saw sticking in the wood when he reached out his hands to me, but now he grasped it again. As I crept down from the stand I heard the low, rasping, gnawing sound recommence, and a tiny shower of fine sawdust fell upon my head.

I stole to the door and crouched there, listening feverishly, but there was no sound from its farther side, save Alaric's deep stertorous breathing, and the occasional creak of his chair as he moved restlessly.

Did the household indeed sleep, secure in the be-

lief that I was drugged and helpless, and Gilbert safely under lock and key? Would their latent suspicions of Lorna's defection rise again to cause them renewed uneasiness, and send them prowling about my room, to assure themselves for the second time that all was well with their scheme?

I shuddered, in spite of myself, and a cold, numb feeling crept about my heart at the bare thought of discovery now, at the very moment of my release. It seemed that ages passed while I crouched there by the door, with the dull, monotonous grating sound of the saw filling my ears. To my tortured senses it grew louder until it was almost deafening. I was sure that it must soon arouse Alaric from his slumbers and that his cry of warning would resound through the house.

At last, after an almost interminable stretch of time, the rasping ceased abruptly with a little squeak, and I heard Gilbert whistle softly above the swirling of the wind.

I crept again to the porthole.

"Ready, Maida? I've got this slab loose now, and I'm going to wrench it out. It may make a bit of noise, but it can't be helped, we must chance that. I think the space will be big enough for me to draw you through. Climb up on that stand again, now, and when I tell you, hold out your arms to me."

Trembling, scarcely daring to breathe, I crept up on

the stand, and waited. All at once, there was a rending, splintering sound, and a wide section of the wall at the side of the porthole gave way. It slipped from Gilbert's hold and fell with a thud upon the grass, and I felt the sharp rush of wind in my face, and the sting of the first drops of rain.

"Now!" cried Gilbert, and obediently I thrust out my arms into the darkness. Two strong hands grasped me, and pulled me forward through the gaping hole. The stand beneath me swayed and rocked with the sudden shifting of my weight but righted itself, and as my knees rested upon the rough wooden edge of the aperture, I braced myself and sprang outward. Gilbert caught and steadied me, and in another moment I stood beside him on the lawn, with the wind and rain swirling all about me, and my face upturned to the velvety black sky. Free!

For an instant he held me tightly, hungrily in his arms, then gently releasing me, he seized my hand, and started off at a swift pace, drawing me with him.

"We must run for our lives, now!" he said. "Try your very hardest to keep up, dear!"

We rounded the corner of the silent house, and took the path leading to the cove where the boat house was. Blind instinct must have guided Gilbert's feet, for we could not see a yard ahead in the inky blackness which enveloped us on every hand. I felt the loose gravel crunch beneath my feet, and the sodden branches, as

we swept them aside in passing, flung a misty spray full in our faces.

When a curve in the path hid us from possible view from the house, Gilbert produced a tiny electric lantern, and flashed it ahead. In the darting light the huge, swaying trees loomed appallingly all about us, and I shrank against him in swift terror, as he hurried me on.

No sound came from the house behind us, and at length we reached the belt of undergrowth which fringed the beach. Spent and breathless, I stumbled, and would have fallen, but he caught me tenderly, and I leaned gaspingly against him. He half-led, half-carried me to where a great stone reared itself from the sands, and seated me there.

"Wait here, dearest. There is something I must do to insure our safety from pursuit. I shall only be away a moment from your side!" he cried in my ear, above the roaring of the wind and waves. Then he sprang away into the darkness. Before me loomed the square bulk of the boat house, and the wide, white sweep of the foam-crested breakers was cleaved by a straight black line which I knew to be the dock.

I waited, in a tense agony of apprehension, my hands clasped upon my heaving breast. Why had he left me? Why had he waited for anything? Would they not awaken, perhaps, and come to find my empty couch and that great gap in the wall? If they did, they

would surely seek me out and carry me back to my prison, and this time there would be no escape from it! They might descend upon me at any minute, and all would be lost! No warning could reach me of their coming, the roaring of the storm would deaden any sound of approaching footsteps. If they once regained possession of me, no mercy would be shown me now; that I knew instinctively. I trusted Gilbert to do what was best, yet my heart cried out to him to return quickly, quickly!

All at once, quite close to me, something moved! A gray shadow detached itself from the deeper gloom and came swiftly forward and a wild despairing cry rose upon my lips. I shrank back against the stone, powerless to move, when a quick, low-breathed sentence fell upon my ears.

"Hush, it is I! Nicolette!"

"Oh," I gasped sobbingly, in relief. "I did not know! I was afraid——"

"Here!" she reached my side, and flung a warm, enveloping cloak about my drenched shoulders. "That will keep you warm. The storm, it is terrible!"

"Why did you come," I exclaimed. "You are running a frightful risk. If they found you here——"

"I came to bring you this," she thrust a warm shapeless bundle into my arms. "It is the *pauvre petit chien*, 'Laddie,' you call him. ✓

"Is he dead?" I cried, feeling the limp, resistless weight against me. "Poor little fellow!"

"No," she answered quickly. "The shot crippled him but he will live. I have chloroformed him just now, only a little, to keep him quiet. I was afraid that he might bark, and betray you."

Even as she spoke, I became aware of a sweetish, heavy, pungent odor on the air, which I had been too excited and unnerved to notice before. I hugged the soft, helpless bundle closer.

"Dear Laddie!" I murmured. "Dear little fellow. How glad Gilbert will be!"

Then I looked up. The girl I had known as Lorna was standing quietly beside me, but I had caught the murmur of a sob, and there was something in the tense rigidity of her attitude, which conveyed to me a swift impression that she was fighting against a breakdown.

"Lorna—Nicolette!" I stammered. "You have done so much for us! Won't you give up your determination, and let us take you away!"

"No, *petite amie*. It is best that I stay with him. Even though I have disobeyed, ruined him, my place is by his side! If we also escape, they may never learn that I have betrayed them, but should I go with you, they will remember, and sooner or later they or their friends will seek me out, wherever I may be, and avenge themselves. I cannot ask immunity for them,

that you will not try to have them captured. I must take my chances with the rest. If we are caught, I pray that you will not attempt to help me. You will keep secret the truth that I aided you to escape. Let me suffer with the others, if I must. I would rather undergo the sentence meted out to me by your courts, than that of Herman Goebel's associates.—Monsieur is returning for you! Good-bye, Maida. Will you try not to think so bitterly of me?"

"I owe my freedom to you, perhaps my life!" I returned. "I shall always remember that, Nicolette. Whatever happens, if there should be any way in which my father or I could help you, you will try to let me know?"

Gilbert approached us swiftly, from the direction of the dock.

"What is it? Who is that?" he cried hoarsely, and I saw that he shifted the pocket lantern to his left hand, while something glinted in his right. Then he recognized her, and gave a little exclamation of relief, and his hand slipped to his hip pocket, and came away empty. "Oh, it is you!" he said, adding quickly, "you will not come with us? We can protect you, and get you safely out of the country, I promise you! Come there's not a moment——"

Nicolette stepped back, with a little decisive shake of her head.

"You are kind to offer it, Monsieur, but it is im-

possible. Take good care of her, and—Goodbye!”

“Then run to the house as quickly as you can, for your own sake——” he broke off, with a startled upward glance, and cried out suddenly: “My God, they’ve discovered us!”

I looked backward, fearfully. Through the rain, a blur of light showed over the trees in the direction of the house and hard upon Gilbert’s voice, came the sound of distant shouts.

Nicolette gave a little, sharply despairing cry, and disappeared into the darkness, and Gilbert grasped me and pulled me swiftly toward the dock. He had not noticed, in his excitement, the bundle which I carried, and although La’lie was a heavy burden, I was too terrified and breathless to gasp out to Gilbert to take him, so I tucked him under my arm and ran as if indeed for my life.

The shouting came nearer, lights flashed behind us, and as we rushed out upon the dock, a volley of revolver shots rang out. I reeled against Gilbert and he steadied me, and said quickly:

“It’s all right. Here we are, dear. Get in!”

I looked down and saw beside the landing place the little racing motorboat, which was pitching perilously about in the choppy sea. Gilbert dropped me swiftly into its narrow cockpit, cast loose, and leaping in after me, started the engine. It crackled and whirred, jerking like a balky horse and with a suffo-



cating clutch of supreme horror at my throat, I heard the sharp patter of running feet close, close to us on the rainswept resounding planks of the dock. Then, just when I gave up all hope, we shot out suddenly over the heaving bosom of the black waters, at the moment when their revolvers spoke again, and there came about us the spatter of bullets, like hail.

I fancied, even above the roaring exhaust of the engine and the hiss of the spray, that I heard Gilbert utter a queer exclamation, like a groan, and he seized and dragged me down until I crouched low in my seat, to avoid their deadly fire. We seemed to be gliding swiftly through a raging cataract, as the huge waves, cleaved by the torpedo-shaped bow fell swirling away on either side, and the rush of wind sucked the breath from my lips. I could not speak, but sat huddled there, clutching Laddie's limp body, my dishevelled, unbound hair clinging to my neck and shoulders, the stinging, salt spray dashing over my drenched, shuddering frame.

My eyelids seemed glued to my face, but when I could raise them I saw ahead of us beyond the tiny arc of misty light from the little boxed lamp before Gilbert's knees, only the limitless blackness of sea and sky alike, with the long feathery ridges of foam-crested rollers sweeping toward us as if to engulf our frail craft.

From the distance behind came the faint popping

of more shots, but we were safely beyond range and flying onward with every second that passed, further and further from that dreaded island, and the peril which lurked there.

All at once there was a deafening, thunderous roar which seemed to split my ears, and a lurid flash of crimson lighted the sea and sky.

"What is it?" I screamed into Gilbert's ear, above the turmoil about us.

"Explosion. I set a time-fuse, and blew up their launch and boathouse, where they had another craft locked away," he shouted back. "We're safe from pursuit now!"

He seemed to make a supreme effort to raise his voice that I might hear, but I was so overwrought that the significance of it escaped me for the moment. I straightened from my cramped position as well as I could, and glanced fearfully over my shoulder. A great pillar of flame was shooting skyward from the cove, which glared blindingly in my face and outlined the whole island in a sinister, blood-red haze.

A tremendous, pitying terror gripped me as I gazed upon it. Wicked, ruthless as they were, could they have perished in that cataclysm—Monsieur Pelissier and Alaric and that arch fiend Herman Goebel? And Nicolette—what of her? I bowed my head. If indeed they had all been hurled to their doom, I hoped God would have mercy on their sullied souls.

The bundle stirred in my arms, and I hugged it tenderly. Gilbert stared at the movement, and I turned eagerly to him.

"It's Laddie!" I cried. "Nicolette found him and brought him to me. They hurt him, but we have him safe!"

Gilbert's lips moved, but I had to bend near so that my dank, salty hair brushed against his face, to catch the words.

"Thank God for that! I thought they had killed the poor little beggar. That brute called Alaric told me so, when he brought me some food this morning. Good old Laddie! Hold him tight, Maida."

Then at last the faintness of his tone brought to me a sharp realization that something was wrong.

"What is the matter?" I screamed out to him. "Oh, Gilbert, you are ill! What is it?"

"It's nothing," he smiled wanly, and took a firmer grip upon the tiny steering wheel. "Don't ask me, dear! Wait till we're well out of this."

A spasm of pain shot across his face as he spoke, and I shrilled in rising horror.

"Gilbert, you shall tell me! Have they hurt you?"

"One of their stray shots!" he gasped. "It caught me here. I didn't want you to know until we were safely ashore. Don't be frightened——"

He had motioned to his side nearest me, and I felt beneath his coat. My hand came away wet, and dripping red.

"You are dying, Gilbert! They have killed you!" I cried.

"No, it's only a mere scratch, I think. You mustn't be alarmed. I'm just a little faint, dear, that's all."

He swayed as he spoke, and for an instant his eyes closed, but he forced them resolutely open, and by the glow of the tiny, hooded light I saw that his face was drawn and ghastly.

"You will bleed to death!" Terror and grief lent strength to my own failing voice. "Let me bind it up and try to staunch the flow!"

"You can't do anything now, Maida. We must reach the mainland first. I've got to watch the engine. It isn't acting right——"

But I scarcely heard. I lifted Laddie from my lap and laid him gently on the bottom of the boat, bracing him with my feet. Then I turned up my skirts and tearing a wide strip from my petticoat flounce, I rolled it into a wad and pressed it against his side, under the coat and held it firmly there. So we crouched for several minutes, which seemed like hours. His last words about the motor not working properly, filtered slowly through my consciousness, and I noticed for the first time that the engine was snorting and throbbing unevenly, like some panting animal spent with the chase, and we were moving forward in perceptible jerks, with pauses and then jarring spurts of speed.

"Oh, God!" I prayed aloud into the storm. "Let us reach the shore in safety! Make him live until we can get help, a doctor! Don't let him die now!"

The wind caught my despairing cry and flung it back derisively into my teeth, and as if in malicious mockery of my invocation, the engine slowed, with a queer rattling pounding sound somewhere inside. Our speed slackened and we were thrown violently apart, as the light shell of a craft pitched and tossed crazily about in the turbulent water.

I tried to steady myself, and clutched the side of the boat with one hand, while with the other I pressed Gilbert's side. He lurched sickeningly, and once his head fell upon my shoulder, but he straightened with a determined effort, and tried to smile.

"Dearest—in my coat pocket—a flask. Can you reach it? I must—keep up—"

His hand was still gripping the steering wheel and I found the flask, unscrewed the top and held it to his lips. He drank and I watched him anxiously. I could see almost immediately that a little color came into his face and he braced himself more firmly.

I replaced the flask, and strained my eyes ahead, trying to pierce the darkness. Surely if Gilbert knew the direction, and had held to it, we must be near the mainland.

But suppose in the inky blackness, and under the stress of his poignant suffering, he had miscalculated,

and swerved from the right course ever so slightly? We might be rushing straight out to sea, in the path of the worst of the storm, or be dashed to atoms on some treacherous rock! I raised my eyes to the sky. It seemed to have lightened a little, and was broken by grayish scudding clouds. It occurred to me, too, that the tempest had diminished in fury; the wind was not so violent, but perhaps that was only because of our lessened speed. If the clouds would only part for a brief moment and the moon send down a tiny ray to guide us, to show us where we were!

I looked back. A red glow still arose from the island, but faint and very far away. We were miles from it, I thought. Surely, if we had been going in the right direction, we would have reached the mainland before this! Then I remembered that distances were always deceptive on the sea. Perhaps a few minutes more would bring us to the shore and safety.

Gilbert still held the wheel, but his head had fallen forward on his breast. The momentary invigoration of the draught of spirits had passed, and his weakness was rapidly overcoming him. I reached again for the flask, but he roused himself slightly and shook his head.

"Must have—head clear!" he muttered. "I'll try to keep up, dear! If—engine breaks down—must fix it. We're nearly there!"

I prayed that it might be true, but the long minutes

passed and no line of shore loomed up in the gloom ahead. As far as I could see the white-capped waves rolled before us, and the engine puffed and throbbed slower and slower, and finally stopped with a hissing sound.

Gilbert released the wheel and bent forward weakly, fumbling with some wrenches and tools in a little case. We were drifting helplessly, quivering and twisting like a dead leaf on the water, and I could feel that we were slowly turning. The rain had ceased and only an occasional dash of spray was flung up in our faces. The wind, too, had diminished in velocity, as I thought, but the sea was as rough as ever. Gilbert was swaying, and I threw my arm about his shoulders to try to steady him.

"Light!" he muttered hoarsely. "Turn the light, dear!"

I moved it until it flashed on the engine, and he worked desperately, but his failing senses were unequal to the task. His groping hands slipped repeatedly, and at length relaxed, and he pitched blindly forward. I caught him back just in time to save him from striking his forehead on the wheel, and dragged him over against me, with his head resting heavily upon my shoulder.

I felt a shudder sweep over his body, and with a last effort he gasped:

"Head her up, Maida dear! Head up in the wind.

I'm done for! The dawn will soon come. Try——try——”

His voice died away into silence and he sagged like a dead thing against me. I had scarcely understood him, and with no knowledge or experience to guide me, I reached my free hand out and grasped the wheel. I turned it a trifle timorously, first one way and then the other, until I could feel the wind blowing straight in my face, and held the wheel steadily there. The sickening sidewise careening of the boat was lessened in that position, but we pitched horribly and I had to exert all my strength to keep Gilbert's body from being tossed into the sea.

Was he dead? I asked myself, fearfully. I could feel no pulse in his limp wrist and his heart seemed stilled forever. Had he given his life for me? Dear heaven! If he only moved or manifestly breathed that I might know! I was utterly alone and helpless on that vast stretch of ocean, in the all-enveloping night! I could only obey him and steady the wheel, holding him close meanwhile, and pray.

Would the dawn ever come? When it did, would it find us within the sight of a sheltering shore, the reach of friendly, helping hands, or would we have gone down to fathomless depths beneath a huge, on-rushing wave? At any moment the frail boat might capsize and Gilbert be swept from my clasp! It was a miracle that we had not foundered long before this



in the clutch of those mountainous, foam-tipped billows!

My arm grew numb about Gilbert's inert form, and the hand upon the wheel seemed wooden, insensate. My whole body ached dully with the continuous strain of the lurching and tossing about, as if I had been beaten with clubs, and to add to my almost overwhelming fears, a deadly drowsiness and lethargy stole over me and I could feel myself sinking, sinking into the uttermost depths of dreamless slumber.

I strove with all my might to fight it off, to force my dazed brain into alert activity once more, but the effort was vain. I clung to the wheel desperately, when my hand would have relaxed. I dragged my eyelids open again and again, as in spite of me they drooped wearily, but slowly and gradually I succumbed. I remember dimly the final struggle, the last attempt to gather my spent energy, to summon my drugged will to do my bidding. Then the strain seemed to cease, the violent pitching became slowly a gentle, restful swaying, like the rocking of a cradle and I drifted off into peaceful, unresisting unconsciousness.

How long the merciful state of coma lasted I could never have told. I only know that some Hand, more steadfast than mine, guided the wheel and held back our puny craft from destruction; some Power, higher than the warring elements, stayed their wrath and

shielded us in our helplessness through that terrible night.

I roused with a feeble start, dimly conscious of subdued shouting as if from a far distance. Racking pains were darting through my body, like knife-thrusts, and a huge weight sagged against me, crushing me down. I tried to move but my numbed muscles would not respond to my will.

The shouting came again, nearer at hand, and I opened my eyes upon a blinding glare of sun in deep-blue, foamy water, a blue sky flecked with snowy clouds, and a horizon line which rose and fell and melted away in a glistening haze.

"Motorboat, ahoy!" The cry rang in my ears, and I turned my head stiffly. A long boat, manned by four sailors, was almost upon us, and there, not fifty yards away, loomed what seemed at first to my dazed vision to be a colossal ship.

Then a vague realization came to me that it was a revenue cutter, and I wondered idly how it came to be there. The air was so clear that I could plainly discern the forms of men rushing about the deck, and one, standing motionless at the rail, caught my eye and electrified me into sudden life. There was something strangely, miraculously familiar about that square heavy, thick-set figure!

Just as the long boat grazed our side I sprang to my feet, in uncontrollable excitement. My frenzy might

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have tumbled both Gilbert and myself into the sea, but the sailors steadied me, and we were drawn into their boat. Laddie whimpered; and with my eyes still fixed upon the deck of the cutter I gasped!

"Please—the little dog! Don't leave him!"

One of the men picked him up and laid him tenderly at my feet. Gilbert they placed beside me and my arms went mechanically about his insensible form again.

As I watched, with every nerve in my body tense, the man upon the cutter's deck raised a megaphone to his lips and shouted something. The words were indistinguishable, but that voice——

I turned tremulously to the nearest bluejacket, as we sped through the sparkling water.

"Who is that man?" I asked, my voice scarcely more than a quivering whisper. "That man with the megaphone?"

"Mr. Waring, Miss?" the sailor replied, with a rising note of eagerness in his voice, and I became aware, even in that supreme moment, that they were all four regarding me with curious, breathless interest. "That's Mr. Larry Waring!"

"I'm his daughter!" I cried. "I'm Maida Waring!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *The Last Word.*

**T**HE next few minutes were like a dream to me forever after. A rising cheer rang in my ears as we darted swiftly forward, and it must have reached the cutter with its message, for my precious Daddy waved the megaphone wildly over his head and danced about, bellowing inarticulately. Another man had joined him, and it seemed as if they were both about to leap into the sea.

We reached the cutter's side and strong arms bore me up the ladder, but it was not until I felt Daddy's arms about me, and his rough, shaggy coat pressing my cheek, that I came fully to my senses.

I clung to him as if I would never let him go, sobbing his name over and over, and he carressed me with a trembling, blundering hand. When I put up my face to kiss him I found that he was crying, too.

"Little Princess!" he gulped. "Daddy's little, stolen girl!"

His great strong body was shaken with sobs, and the tears rolled unashamed down his face. I had never seen a man cry before in all my life and I tried, in a half-frightened way, to console him.

"Daddy, dear, it's all right now, I'm safe! Don't, dear, I can't bear it!"

"They haven't harmed you, my baby? You're sure they haven't ill-treated you?" his voice broke harshly.

"No, Daddy! They didn't hurt me! It's all over now, Gilbert has brought me back to you!"

The man beside Daddy, who had been patting both our shoulders and coughing and choking suspiciously himself, suddenly grasped my arm and demanded:

"Who!"

"Gilbert Spear." I turned to him in surprise at his exclamation. He was a stranger to me, and an older man than Daddy, quite stout and bald and shining. "He saved me from them," I explained. "He rescued me from that island where they held me prisoner. —Oh, where is he? What has been done with him?"

"God bless my soul!" the stout man's voice rang out in a shrill cry: "He's my boy!"

And he raced off down the deck with surprising agility, while Daddy tucked me under his arm and followed.

Gilbert didn't die. He had lost consciousness from loss of blood, but the surgeon brought him around

long before we reached the mainland. We didn't have to tell Daddy anything, either. The way my arms closed around Gilbert, when they let me go to him, and the way his eyes sought mine when consciousness first returned, must have explained the situation between us far more completely than we could have done, for although nothing was said at the moment, I saw Daddy and Gilbert's father over in the corner shaking hands and clapping each other on the back, and then Gilbert drew me down and kissed me right before them.

Just then Laddie came hobbling in on three legs and nearly wagged his little screw tail off, and I hugged him and broke down and cried again; I didn't know why.

The revenue cutter had picked us up several miles out at sea, so it was as I feared. Gilbert in the storm and darkness and his pain, had lost his bearings. It was quite two hours before we reached the mainland, and in the meantime, after I had breakfasted and tidied myself as best I could, the chief of police, who was on board, as well as a higher official from Washington, who had been with Daddy and Arnold Spear throughout the search for me, came in to hear both our stories. I carefully kept my unspoken promise to Nicolette, and did not reveal the part she had taken in our escape, and Gilbert followed my lead, pretending that he himself had broken out of the lighthouse,

and that we had found Laddie, crippled, on the beach of the cove. I told every other detail that I could remember which might have any possible bearing on the conspiracy, from the moment the doors of Miss Farmingdale's had closed behind me, even to that cry in the night and the flowerbed which was never completed, and which looked so much like a grave.

The chief could scarcely restrain his amazement when I told him of Herman Goebel and Connie Cole, and I wish I could have had a photograph of Daddy's face at the mention of May Grady and the role she had played.

"I know who they all are now," the chief remarked, when I had finished. "Pelissier is that scoundrel's real name, as it happens, although he's traveled under many another in his time, and Nicolette is his wife. They're infernally clever swindlers and confidence workers of the first grade, and they're wanted from Petersburg to Frisco, Scotland Yard to Cape Town. Years ago, before they met, Pelissier was a steamship crook and card-sharp, and this Alaric must have been his old side-partner, 'Kid-Glove' Craigen. Nicolette was arrested the day you disappeared, Miss Waring, in the lobby of the Hotel Blenheim, for turning a trick in Los Angeles a year ago, but she escaped. Goebel's been a menace for years, but we've got something on him at last, which will put him away for life. May Grady's been up to Auburn twice for grand

larceny; posed as a visiting manicure and made off with family jewels. But Connie Cole's the queen of the lot! I congratulate you, Miss Waring, on discovering their identity so cleverly—you would have made a splendid detective. We'll drop you people ashore and go back and bag the lot."

"Not me, you won't!" Daddy declared. "Arnold, you and your boy can look after Maida for a few hours I guess. It looks to me as if Gilbert meant to, anyway, in the future, and if he succeeds as well as he has in the past, I can't ask any more! But I'm going to have one crack at that gang that stole my little girl, if I have to row myself back to that island in the broken-down cockshell we found her in, and I'll be there before the rest of you, at that! I want to get at 'em, that's all!"

But the officials overruled him and we were all four landed at Kittery and made comfortable in a neat, modest little hostelry. I rested, and the proprietor's daughter, round-eyed with wonder, lent me some clothes and I felt almost myself again.

The village went mad with excitement at the news of our coming, and the furore extended to Portsmouth, so that in a few hours the narrow streets were thronged. We were sheltered securely from publicity in our rooms at the hotel, however, and Daddy managed to get hold of a stenographer and dictated telegrams until he was hoarse.



Then he came into the big sunny sitting-room where Arnold Spear and I sat on either side of Gilbert's couch, while Laddie, all trussed up in splints, lay curled at his feet. Mr. Spear was telling us how it was that the revenue cutter happened so opportunely to be in our vicinity. Some false clue had taken them—he and Daddy and the Washington official—as far as Boston, when, as I had supposed, Raoul Pelissier had sent that wireless offering fresh terms, to Daddy's secretary in New York, who had promptly forwarded the message. They had thereupon started out at once in the cutter to search the country adjacent to the wireless stations from which the guarded but unmistakable proposition had come, and it must have been the sight of them cruising about the island on the day preceding my escape which had caused uneasiness to Goebel and his associates. At sundown they had made a wide detour out to sea, consequently the detonation of the explosive did not reach them, although they saw the glow of the flames but had thought it a bonfire at some beach on the mainland.

Two police boats had gone with the revenue cutter to the island, after putting us ashore, and we all awaited their return in indescribable suspense. Gilbert and I told his father and mine privately of the aid Nicolette had rendered us. I was determined to help her in some way if she were captured, and I saw that the others were of my mind, too, although Daddy

said very little. Aside from dictating his telegrams he had been strangely silent all day.

When he did speak his mind at last, curiously enough, the indignation he expressed in trenchant, unqualified terms was directed, not so much against Herman Goebel, the ring-leader of the whole conspiracy, as against the two women, Connie Cole and May Grady. What he said about the latter alone was quite unprintable, but when he cooled down a trifle, a remark which he made to Mr. Spear concerning them both was characteristic.

"By George, Arnold, old man!" he exclaimed. "I thought I was pretty wise, but the Grady girl sold my office secrets and then helped hoodwink Maida; Connie Cole got to me first for thirty thousand, and then for my daughter! I guess I wouldn't be the first fool on record who'd been done twice by the same woman, but this goes double and takes in the lookout! Two scores apiece by the same two women! By Gad, I ought to be Oslerized!"

The afternoon passed, and just at dusk the proprietor knocked at the door, and called Daddy outside. He was gone more than an hour, and when he returned, he looked very grave and stern, as if he had received some kind of a shock, too.

"When you blew up their boathouse, Gilbert, you did for two of them," he said, in a significant tone. "Pelissier and Craigen have gone to their account."

"Poor Nicolette!" I cried softly, my thoughts darting swiftly to the unhappy wife, but no one heard me except Gilbert and he only pressed my hand, quietly.

"Goebel's injured, but he'll live, I hope, to spend a few wholesome years in prison," Daddy went on. "The chief got them all. The women aren't hurt. I saw them just now in the lockup, and that she-devil, Connie Cole, had the brass to laugh in my face and tell me I was beginning to show my age! They can't get the French one to say a word, but the Grady girl's cornered like a rat in a trap, and telling all she knows. Maida——" he turned to me suddenly. "I don't want to distress you now, Little Princess, but that sailor on the yacht whom you told all of us about this morning—the one who picked up your handkerchief and called you 'Miss Smith' and whom you overheard talking in an insolent tone to Craigen just before you landed—didn't you say he was fair-haired, and very broad shouldered and tanned, with bold prominent eyes?"

"Yes," I replied, and without knowing why, I began to tremble.

"Well," continued Daddy. "You'll have to hear it at the time of the trial, anyway, and you may as well learn the truth now. His body was in that grave which you concluded was a flowerbed!"

I cried out, but Gilbert's hand on my shoulder stilled my rising horror.

"It must have been his death-cry you heard the night of your arrival," Daddy remarked. "When you told the chief of your suspicions concerning the grave, he made a point of having the spot dug up, and when they found him they confronted the Grady girl with the evidence, as she was the easiest to approach. Wild with terror she was eager to wash her hands of any complicity in the murder, and swore she knew nothing about it until after it was all over. It seems that this sailor, Ole Larsen, had been previously employed on ocean liners and recognized Pelissier and Craigen at once as crooks who had been posted in the smoking room. He wondered what new game they were up to, and became convinced that it centered around you, Maida, when he found you were not Miss Smith, as he had been given to understand. Just before you landed he approached Craigen with the idea of intimidating him into paying hush money. He didn't have any idea what the scheme was, but he knew there was something crooked in the wind. The yacht had only been hired for the occasion, so of course it would never have done to let him get away from the island with the information he already possessed. Craigen made an appointment with him for late that night, and then he and Pelissier did for the fellow—garrotted him, in true Apache fashion. May Grady doesn't know how they succeeded in

explaining his defection to the Captain of the yacht, so that he would sail the next morning without the Swede; they probably said he had deserted, or was going to stay and care for the motor boats. I wouldn't be too sorry for him, Maida. He tried to blackmail, remember, and he only got what was coming to him."

"It seems terrible, though!" I exclaimed. "No wonder I had that presentiment about the flower-bed!"

"And you never would tell me what frightened you so, the day you fell in on my tea-party!" Gilbert said, reproachfully.

"It seemed too silly!" I confessed. "I was afraid you would laugh at me!"

"Laugh at you!" Gilbert added some more, but it hasn't anything to do with this story.

And indeed, there is little more to tell. The day after our rescue, the real Aunt Julie, with her family, arrived in a special car from Boston, and as soon as I saw her I wondered how I had ever been taken in for a moment by Connie Cole's burlesque of her, although the imitation of her voice and appearance had been remarkably done. Alaric was a good-looking, attractive boy, and he and Gilbert grew quite chummy almost at once, while Bijou was exquisite and dainty and fairy like. But it was the true Lorna who nearly took my breath


away. Nicolette's representation of her had been marvelous, a superb exhibition of dramatic art. Indeed, so life-like had it appeared that I was uncomfortable at first in the presence of the real girl, as if an uncanny sense of dual personality oppressed me, but it wore away in time.

Mrs. Smith insisted vigorously on going to the prison and having a look at the culprits there, and when she returned she told much which helped to clear up the situation.

Connie Cole, posing as a wealthy Denver widow, Mrs. Collins, had met her casually in Europe and learned that she was an old time friend of ours. Months later, in America, evidently looking for more details about us, when the adventuress had been drawn into Herman Goebel's scheme, she looked up Mrs. Smith and wormed her way into our friend's confidence. Nicolette, for the same purpose of obtaining data concerning us, had worked for Mrs. Smith for several months as a French maid.

The rest came out later at the trial. The original idea of the band had been to steal me in Europe that summer, and May Grady had been sent to Daddy's office to learn what she could about him and his plans. Incidentally, she had sold his business secrets for her own private profit.

When they learned that our plans had changed



and I was to visit Mrs. Smith, it appeared as if fate had played directly into their hands and they hurriedly arranged for their little coup.

The motorcar in which I had been conveyed from school to the yacht had been purchased and altered for that one occasion into an exact replica of Mrs. Smith's. The yacht itself, as well as the house on the island, had been rented for the season from perfectly unsuspecting respectable owners, and the servants, except Lucie, were absolutely innocent of any complicity in the scheme.

Raoul Pelissier had forged my two letters from Daddy, postmarks and all, and I might have discovered their plot far earlier than I did, if I had not unwittingly betrayed the fact that I knew Mr. Hilton, but not Mr. Fordyce, thereby giving them an opportunity to warn Herman Goebel to change the character in which he presented himself to me.

The result of the trial is known to all the world; how Connie Cole and Herman Goebel were sent to prison for life and May Grady and Nicolette Pelissier received terms of twenty years each. Nicolette is still in prison. Daddy says it is too soon to attempt to do anything toward her release, but I happen to know that he is privately pulling a few influential wires, and it will not be long before on some so-called technicality, the doors of the prison will swing open for her, and she will be spirited

away to some forgotten corner of her beloved France, to make of the shattered fragments of her life what she may. Of the others I try not to think.

Daddy didn't leave me, after all, that summer. He announced pretty plainly where that European business could go to, and we all spent the rest of the season with Mrs. Smith. Daddy neglected his business shamefully and hung about me every moment that his idea of tact didn't suggest his leaving Gilbert and me alone together, and we had a perfectly lovely time.

We're going to Europe this summer, though, all of us together. That's why Gilbert and I went to Palm Beach on our honeymoon.

THE END.





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